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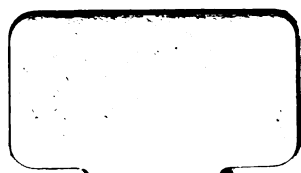
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FAMILY LECTURES
ON
THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

VOL. II.



FAMILY LECTURES,

IN THREE PARTS,

ON THE

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

OF THE

Christian Religion :

FOR THE

USE OF FAMILIES, & FOR GENERAL INSTRUCTION.

WITH

AN ADDRESS TO SERIOUS INQUIRERS

ON THE

MEANS OF OBTAINING THAT KNOWLEDGE OF DIVINE TRUTH
WHICH LEADS TO SALVATION.

BY JOHN PRIDHAM, M.A.

FARINGDON, BERKS.

SECOND EDITION.

VOL. II.



All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, or reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. 2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. Rev. xxii. 14.

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FAMILY LECTURES.

PART II.

ON OUR DUTY TO GOD, AND THE DISPOSITIONS
WHICH WE SHOULD MANIFEST TOWARDS HIM.

LECTURE XXXVI.

ON LOVE TO GOD.

Mark xii. 30.—*And thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.*

IN the former part of this work, I have treated of the fundamental doctrines of the two covenants which God has made with mankind. The first was entered into with Adam in a state of innocence, which he voluntarily broke by his disobedience^a: and the second, with his fallen race, through Christ our Mediator, whose death ratified the solemn compact between God and man, and ensured the bestowment of its exalted blessings^a.

A sincere faith in these momentous doctrines is necessary to salvation; because they are manifestly a revelation from heaven, acquainting us with the only method by which the lost favour of God may be regained. To slight, then, these doctrines, or to hold them, as is too commonly the case, as mere matters of speculation, must be a high affront to God, who has seen fit to reveal them for the regulation of our belief and practice: and it must be attended with ruinous consequences to ourselves; since it is only

^a Gen. iii. 1—20.

^a Mat. xxvi. 28.

by a vital faith in Christian principles that we can be rightly influenced to obey God, and honour Christ by all the fruits of a righteous life. Whilst, therefore, we decidedly object to a cold sceptical spirit, which refuses to receive the Christian scheme as essential to salvation, we protest most loudly against the licentiousness of Antinomianism, which "imprisons the truth of God in unrighteousness^b," and destroys the souls of its advocates by an unhallowed zeal without Scriptural knowledge and obedience. Against such persons the censure of St. Paul is justly levelled:—"They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate^{bb}."

The Scriptures invariably found the most valuable practical instructions upon the doctrines which they inculcate: which establishes the fact, that the design of Christianity is not only to enlighten us with the knowledge of divine things, but also to purify our hearts, and to produce an uniformly upright and holy life. "Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word; that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish^c."

It is clear, then, that they who do not strive to manifest the effects of an orthodox creed, by a compliance with the precepts of the Gospel, however strenuously they may contend for the doctrinal points of religion, are indeed entire strangers to the very nature and design of those holy principles in which they professedly confide for salvation. To such unsound professors of his Gospel, Christ now

^b Rom. i. 18. ^{bb} Tit. i. 16. ^c Ephes. v. 25—27.

says, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord; whilst ye do not the things which I command you?"

How careful was the Apostle of the Gentiles to guard his doctrine from abuse, by enforcing its moral tendency, and by cautioning his converts lest any of them should "receive the grace of God in vain^d." Like a wise master-builder, after he had laid a right foundation in Christian principles, he was peculiarly solicitous to raise upon it a goodly superstructure, consisting of all the ornamental fruits of a devoted life. Composed of such holy materials, he well knew the spiritual fabric would endure that fiery process "which is to try every man's work, of what sort it is^e." We are, indeed, "saved by grace, through faith: and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast^f." Yet, at the same time that we inflexibly maintain this cardinal point, we must give all diligence to shew the reality and genuineness of our faith, by an unreserved conformity to his Divine will.

Both our Lord and his Apostles maintained that the doctrines which they taught had a direct tendency to promote the cause of practical godliness. When our Saviour had explained to his hearers the spirituality and extent of the Law, he immediately enforced his instructions, by requiring obedience thereto, as the strongest proof of their regard to him, and of their personal interest in those important truths which he had laid before them:—"Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon

^d 2 Cor. vi. 1.

^e 1 Cor. iii. 13.

^f Ephes. ii. 8, 9.

that house, and it fell not ; for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand ; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell ; and great was the fall of it^s.”

To a belief, then, of the doctrines of Christ, must be joined a suitable attention to the duties of the Gospel ; by which we shall evince “ that we love God, and are the called according to His purpose.” Every sincere believer thus proves the genuine quality of his faith, by works of righteousness, which demonstrate his meetness for the heavenly state.

We shall glance at those duties which the Christian is bound to perform, and by the due observance of which his progress and comfort in the walk of faith will be greatly advanced.

Love to God is essential to true religion, and constitutes the grand difference betwixt the enemies and the friends of Christ^{ss}. Love is the strongest passion that can sway the human breast. It has tamed the most savage heart, and inclined it to acts of mercy and kindness. It improves the conduct of the worst men, in proportion as they yield themselves up to its power ; and it gives a polished sweetness to the manners of the virtuous and wise, which diffuses pleasure among all who participate its benign effects. When this passion, therefore, is separated as much as possible from the alloy which too often mixes with it, it is not improperly selected by our Maker as the most certain criterion of our re-

^s Mat. vii. 24—28.

^{ss} John xxi. 15—17.

ligious sincerity:—"If ye love me, keep my commandments^h." Unreserved obedience is the necessary result of a holy affection towards God.

And there can be no doubt, but that he is every way entitled to our regard; whether we contemplate his character, perfections, and loving-kindness, or the relation we bear to him. "A son honoureth his father; and a servant, his master: if I then be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of Hostsⁱ."

Now, when the truths of the Gospel are received into a regenerate heart by faith, they excite and increase admiring love of the Divine perfections, as displayed in all the works of God; but especially in that marvellous instance of his goodness to us, redemption by Jesus Christ. Hence arise fervent desires after that happiness which is found in contemplating his glory, and enjoying his love. Then "the soul is athirst for God;" and, in proportion to the prevalence of this holy affection for the supreme good, all inferior objects lose their attractions.

There are some properties, which our love to God must possess; and by which it must discover itself, to render it acceptable.

1. Our regard for God should be sincere: for how can He be gratified with the hypocritical professions of worldly men, who do "but flatter with their lips, and dissemble in their double hearts?" Let us, if we would testify a suitable regard for God, love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strengthⁱⁱ. Love to God must be deeply rooted in the breast, before it is capable of acting as a governing principle, to constrain us to honour and magnify his name.

^h John xiv. 15.

ⁱ Mal. i. 6.

ⁱⁱ Mark xii. 30.

2. It is necessary that our affection for God should be fervent, to obtain his acceptance. He expresses the claims which he has to our service and respect, in unqualified terms: "My son, give me thine heart^k." Hence we learn that he will have our undivided and warmest love, if he acknowledge us as dutiful children. He expects us to prefer Him to every other object; and our obligations to Him require it.

Of course, then, God can never approve of those insincere professors, who give the largest share of their hearts to the enjoyment of sinful pleasures, and with the rest try to conciliate his favour^l. We should not long retain in our employment a servant who would entirely neglect his duty one part of the day, and perform it but carelessly, or indifferently, the other. And can we suppose that God, to whom we owe perpetual obedience, will relax his demands, and be satisfied, if we devote only some little fragments of our time and attention to him; whilst we give all the remainder to the gratification of carnal desires?

3. To ensure the approbation of God, our love must be constant, and uninterrupted in its exercise. Some run well for a time in the Christian course: they discover much zeal; and even outshine the saints of the Most High in the apparent ardour of devout affections. But their pretended love soon expires, when chilled by the blasts of temptation, or reproach for Christ's sake; and then they "draw back, and walk no more with him^l." In opposition to these momentary feelings of regard, let us cherish in our bosoms a steady and permanent and increased love to God,—a hallowed flame of affection, which neither temptation nor unbelief shall be able to extinguish.

^k Prov. xxiii. 26. ^l Mat. vi. 24. ^l John vi. 66. Luke viii. 13.

4. We cannot fix any degree, at which our love to God should stop; since it is impossible that it should ever reach those excellencies of the Divine Being which challenge it. Excessive attachment to a created object is extremely culpable; because it alienates the heart from God, whose property it is. But the highest expression of love to Jehovah falls infinitely short of a suitable return for his unequalled goodness to us, both in redemption and providence. There is no danger, therefore, of running into excess in this respect. Christians may laudably indulge the sacred ambition of striving who can love him most, and serve him best. And, after all, they will admit that the warmest display of their affections toward such a Being is poor, and disproportionate to his glorious perfections.

5. Our regard to God is most suitably evidenced by a respect to his commands. How shall we be able to prove our esteem for him, if we neglect his injunctions, and refuse to honour his authority? Shew, then, your attachment to his service, by obedience to his will, rather than by mere expressions of regard,—by works of righteousness, more than by professions, which are only sincere when they terminate in a holy life. Christ measures our esteem for him by this standard: “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and manifest myself unto him. He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings^m.”

Indeed, there is no motive sufficiently powerful to dispose us to avoid what God dislikes, and to do what he enjoins, but genuine affection for him. We are always ready to do any thing in our power for

^m John xiv. 21—25.

those whom we tenderly love; and are careful not to risk their favour, by an act that is likely to provoke their displeasure.

Just in the same way shall we demean ourselves toward God, if a filial regard for his holy name predominates in our souls. Inflamed with zeal for his glory, we shall aspire after goodness, as that which he most approves in his rational creatures; and we shall dread iniquity, because it is offensive to him, and ruinous to ourselves. Influenced by these considerations, we shall exclaim with Joseph, in the hour of temptation, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!"

6. True love to God is evinced by a delight in him, as the highest source of satisfaction; and by an ardent desire to obtain his favour. Men wish to be esteemed by those whom they venerate, and think it a great satisfaction to procure their approbation of their behaviour.

The manifestation of the Divine regard to penitent sinners produces affection in their minds towards God. When "they have tasted that the Lord is gracious," their happiness is entirely made up in him. Meditations on his matchless compassion, in selecting them as special objects of his love, produce the most satisfactory delight^{mm}. And when his favour is attained, they feel a holy anxiety to preserve it; which leads them to pay a conscientious attention to his sovereign pleasure, yea, "to watch and pray," lest the fervour of their love should abate, and thus their comfortable experience of divine things should be either lost or suspended.

7. Furthermore, it is the property of sincere affection to wish for continual intercourse with the object of its regard. During its absence, it is remembered

^{mm} Psalm civ. 34. cxxxix. 17, 18.

with the greatest pleasure. The thoughts frequently ruminate upon it; whilst any good qualities, for which it is distinguished, present themselves forcibly to the mind. Even the temporary loss of its company is a privation severely felt, which is manifested by the actions, and words, and lamentations of those persons whose affections are thus engaged.

It is precisely the same with a soul which sincerely loves its God. The devout aspirations of David justly represent its feelings:—"Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God. My soul is athirst for the Living God: when shall I come to appear before the presence of my God?" His smile irradiates the mind. When he indulges it with communion with himself, all is joy and peace; the graces of the renewed soul prosper; and fruit is brought forth to perfection. But if God withdraw the light of his countenance, it is plunged in gloom, and mourns over His absence; as a calamity too heavy to be endured°. Nor can it rest satisfied, until, by persevering efforts, it regains some tokens of the Divine favour.

° Psalm xlii. 1, 2.

° ib. lxxvii. 7—10.

LECTURE XXXVII.

ON THE DEDICATION OF OURSELVES TO THE SERVICE OF GOD.

Exod. xxxii. 29. *Consecrate yourselves to-day to the Lord.*

GRATITUDE to the Lord of Heaven and earth, for our creation, and the multiplied favours which he heaps upon us in the dispensations of his providence, will constrain us to inquire, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" The

voice of Scripture and reason distinctly reply, "Serve God in righteousness and true holiness all the days of your life." Such a devotion of ourselves to him, by a particular act of consecration, is what we are going to recommend, as a duty fraught with the most important advantages.

Dedication imports the setting apart of a person or thing to an especial use. Thus, the high-priests, and the inferior ministers under the Law, as well as the order of Nazarites, were devoted to the service of God, by certain rites and ceremonies observed for that purpose; by which they covenanted with Jehovah to be his faithful servants for ever^a. The whole furniture of the Tabernacle, with all its vessels and utensils, were consecrated to religious uses; so that it was not lawful to profane them by an application to any other purpose.

The Temple of Solomon, like our modern sanctuaries, was dedicated to the Most High, by pious ceremonies, and by prayers, in which the presence and blessing of God was invoked for those who might worship therein^a.

1. When, therefore, we dedicate ourselves to God, we express, by that act, our wish to become his unalienable property, and to "serve him continually, with a perfect heart and a willing mind^b:" and He thus becomes our God, Father, and everlasting friend; consults our temporal and eternal happiness; and engages, by his covenant, never to leave nor forsake us, till he has performed the promises by which he binds himself to bless us^{bb}.

• In this way, every one should live devoted to the Lord, who has a peculiar right to the homage of his

^a Lev. viii. 1—36. Numb. vi. 1—22.

^b 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

^{aa} 2 Chron. vi. 1—42.

^{cc} Jer. xxxii. 38—42.

creatures. He has formed us in his own image, with a view to secure the devout exercise of our affections for himself; and afterwards to translate us to his kingdom above, where blessedness without end is prepared for his obedient people. If then, Reader, you are under the influence of that love to God which was described in the last discourse, it will sweetly constrain you to dedicate yourself to him, by every token of filial obedience: you will esteem his service, as honourable in itself; and delight to promote his righteous cause throughout the world.

2. The act of dedication, which we now speak of, includes the devotion of soul and body, as well as those holy dispositions which are requisite for this end. Every faculty of the former, and power of the latter, will perform, in this case, its right and appropriate functions; and the whole will concur in rendering unto God a true and laudable service. The persons thus consecrated, must look on themselves as no longer their own, but as vessels of honour and glory, prepared for their Heavenly Master's use*. His smile will more than compensate their obedience whilst on earth: but who can tell the rich reward of grace which they shall receive in heaven?

Let, then, the endowments and faculties of the mind be actively engaged in serving God.

3. With our understanding, let us seek information, from the Scriptures, concerning the nature, works, and commands of the Lord, in order that we may know how to please him on whom our felicity depends.

Let us beware of the guilt which will be contracted by the wilful misuse or abuse of our reason;

* 2 Tim. ii. 21. 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

and pray that God would grant unto us a right "understanding in the way of godliness;" that we "may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints^d."

4. With our will, let us implicitly submit to the requirements of God's most holy word, and the dispensations of his providence; not murmuring at his appointments, but fully acquiescing in all he does, as the result of the profoundest wisdom and the most enlarged goodness. When his dealings appear inexplicable to us, instead of cavilling at them, we should leave them till that day when our improved knowledge will enable us to see the propriety of them; and, in the mean time, let us exclaim, in admiration of His matchless perfections, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out^e!"

5. Let us invariably set our affections on those things which God approves, and which tend to the edification and profit of our souls. Following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who alone can enlighten our understandings, let our hearts aspire after the favour of God, and the everlasting joys of heaven.

Whilst many debase their minds by confining them to objects and pursuits merely carnal and secular, let us raise our souls up to God, and meditate on the glories of his kingdom.

6. Let our memories be depositories of heavenly truths and maxims, to be drawn from this treasury, and applied to every occasion and circumstance of

^d Ephes. i. 18.

^e Rom. xi. 33.

life. Thus we shall be always furnished with the means of honouring God, and benefitting our fellow-creatures.

7. The conscience is to act like a faithful monitor, to warn us of approaching danger, to stimulate us to every good work, and to suggest motives for the performance of our duty.

8. Nor should our bodies refuse to lend their cheerful concurrence in the work of devotion to God, since they are formed capable of uniting with the mind in religious exercises. What the one designs, the other executes.

Our eyes can survey and gaze upon the wonderful beauties of creation. Instead, then, of "beholding vanity," let our sight contemplate those objects that will at once delight and profit our souls. Our tongues are able to speak the praises of God, shew forth his glory, acknowledge his mercies, and invoke his gracious aid.

Let not blasphemy, oaths, execrations, slander, folly, or obscenity, which are awful perversions of speech, ever defile our lips^{ee}.

With our hands lifted up to heaven, we can worship God; or, being stretched out to perform acts of benevolence, we can relieve the wants of the brethren of Christ, and, according to our means, assist all who are necessitous and indigent.

Our feet will enable us to move with pious alacrity in the paths of righteousness and truth. They should bring us to the Tabernacle of God, with a joyful heart. Nor should they be backward to take us to the abodes of ignorance and misery; in order that, by our religious instructions, we may teach the way of salvation to those who are "perishing for lack of know-

^{ee} Ephes. iv. 29. Col. iv. 6.

ledge ;” and, by our charity and sympathy, we may relieve the necessities of the poor, and assuage the grief of the sorrowful.

When all the combined powers of our nature are thus exerted, we employ them for the purposes for which they were designed. But sin has so grossly perverted and disordered our faculties, that they cannot act in full accordance with the will of God, until he devotes them to his glory, by giving them a new tone and direction. “I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou hast enlarged my heart^f.”

Pray that His grace may consecrate your hearts to his service ; and then “his yoke will be easy, and his burthen light.”

9. There are two motives by which the duty may be enforced. First ; the service of God is of such a nature as to recommend itself to our notice ; and, secondly, it has properties and advantages peculiar to itself. It is not like the blind adoration which the covetous pay to their gods of gold and silver ; nor the servile attention with which the ambitious pursue their favourite objects ; nor the abject devotion which sinners display in the indulgence of their criminal pleasures : for these, dazzled by illusive appearances, are the slaves of a master who compels them to yield a cruel submission to his usurped authority^{ff}. No ; unlike to such a servitude, the service of God, which is happiness itself, “is perfect freedom.” His grace delivers the soul from the tyranny of Satan, frees it from the dominion of iniquity, and brings it to the enjoyment of the most delightful liberty, “even the glorious liberty which belongs to the Children of God.”

^f Psalm cxix. 32.

^{ff} 2 Tim. ii. 26. John viii. 44.

The service of the Lord is entitled to the following character. It is spiritual, requiring the exercise of holy affections ; which, whilst they produce the highest satisfaction now, fit the soul for immortal pleasures hereafter. It is rational ; imposing no harsh or unreasonable restraints ; and prescribing no conditions, but such as are wise, good, and conducive to our happiness. It is highly honourable ; for to be the servants of Him “by whom kings reign and princes decree justice,” is a distinction which we may well feel ambitious to attain ; since angels, who can rightly discriminate betwixt good and evil, deliberately choose the service of God. They fly with ardour and delight to execute his commands. And should not we think the meanest station in his house, or the lowest office we can discharge for him, a dignity, of which we are unworthy ? Thus, devotion to the will of God has a claim to our attention, from the excellency of its nature.

10. Moreover, we should be drawn to this act of dedication to God, from a consideration of the benefits to be derived therefrom. He is able to reward our poor endeavours to please him, with “a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” And surely this is a recompence, which, if we love our souls, will stimulate us “to be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.”

* Psalm lxxxiv. 10, 11.

LECTURE XXXVIII.

ON THE WORSHIP OF ALMIGHTY GOD.

John iv. 24.—*God is a Spirit; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

THE infinite wisdom, goodness, and power of Jehovah call forth the praises of the heavenly host. Angels, in token of adoration, prostrate themselves before him, cast their given crowns at his feet, and worship him, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord! to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created^a."

In this respect, the conduct of the inhabitants of heaven is deserving of general imitation by mankind. Nor can it, we conceive, be fairly denied, either that God is the sole and proper object of worship, or that it is the bounden duty of all men thus to honour him. Surely that Glorious Being who spake every thing into existence by his sovereign Word; who made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all things which they respectively contain; and whose power and wisdom are daily exerted in maintaining the works of his hands—that Being, who "is just and right, and without iniquity^b," and whose inimitable perfections draw forth the admiration of cherubims and seraphims, ought to be acknowledged, by every one of his rational creatures, to be entitled to his best service and praise.

God establishes his claim to our worship and regard, by the strongest arguments. First; He, as our Creator, says to each of us, "My son, give me thine heart:" because he brought us into existence,

^a Rev. iv. 10, 11.

^b Deut. xxxii. 4.

and gave us life, speech, and reason. Secondly ; as our hourly Benefactor, he challenges our love and esteem. Through His bounty, our various wants are all supplied ; and by His unremitted care we are preserved from a thousand evils which would otherwise destroy us.

Now, these considerations are alleged as cogent reasons for devoting our whole souls unto him. " O come, let us worship and bow down : let us kneel before the Lord our Maker ! For He is our God ; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand^c." Thirdly ; as our Redeemer, the Lord demands our reverential homage. When we had brought ourselves into bondage to sin, Satan, and Death, and had incurred the awful curse of the violated law ; when we had forfeited heaven, and rendered ourselves liable to the wrath of God ; then he stretched forth his hand to save us from sinking into the pit of perdition. " God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us^d." Yes, he gave his Son to redeem us from all iniquity, and to exalt us to everlasting bliss.

No right, then, can be stronger, than that which God has to our worship, on the ground of redemption. Having thus purchased us with the inestimably precious blood of his Son, we are become his property ; and ought " to glorify Him, in our body, and in our spirit, which are his^e."

Accordingly, we find Jehovah, in his word, exhorting the whole human race to adore his name and perfections ; and founding his claims to their reverence, upon their relation to him, and the mercies which he bestows upon them. " Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name ; bring an offering ; and

^c Psalm xcv, 6, 7.

^d Rom. v. 8.

^e 1 Co^r — 13

come into his courts. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness^f !” Each individual of our species is invited to join in the pious act, whatever his rank or condition may be, whether he be a prince or a subject, poor or rich, learned or ignorant ; since each one should feel an equal desire to conciliate the favour of God, which is better than life, or any advantages which it can command.

This obligation to worship the Lord is universal in its application, extending to the utmost boundaries of the vast creation. “ Let the whole earth stand in awe of him^g.” Even inanimate and irrational creatures are called upon to do him homage^h.

What surprising condescension does it argue in God, thus to solicit the respect of his fallen creatures. This he does, not because he needs their service to augment his “glory, which is above the heavens,” but from motives of compassion towards them in their low estate. The universality of the command to honour God, by religious worship, is a sufficient confutation of the deistical notion, that He is too much exalted to concern himself about us, much less to exact religious service from us.

The term ‘worship’ signifies adoration, reverence, and honour : it includes that religious service which we owe unto God, consisting of praise, prayer, and the stated observance of Divine ordinances. It is either public, when we unite in acts of devotion with the congregation : or it is private ; in which, singly, or with our families, we invoke the name and blessing of the Lord.

Particular attention should be paid to the manner of worshipping him. Our religious duties are not to be performed in a light and trifling spirit,

^f Ps. xcvi. 8, 9. ^g ib. ver. 9. ^h ib. cxlviii. 1—5. & cl. 6.

but with the greatest solemnity and devotion. Indeed, when we reflect on the dignity of Him with whom we have to transact this serious and important business, we should be very careful to abstain from the least appearance of irreverence, either in our posture or behaviour. Solomon gives this general direction for our conduct in the management of Divine Worship: "Keep thy foot, when thou goest to the House of God; and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil^b."

Further; our worship of the Most High must possess the following properties, to commend it to His favourable notice:—

1. It should be spiritual and rational. All the faculties of the mind are to be engaged in the solemn work of devotion—the understanding, affections, conscience, and memory. It is not enough that the powers of the body, the mouth, the hands, and the feet, should be thus honourably employed; but, like David, we should summon the exertion of the combined energies of the whole man, in the pious act of worshipping God. "Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me, bless his holy name¹!"

2. It should be sincere and true. Simplicity and godly sincerity must ever characterize our service, if we wish to have it approved by Him "who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins of the children of men." The feelings of our souls ought to respond to, and be read in, the expressions of our lips; otherwise, like the Pharisees, we shall incur the censure of hypocrisy². Our Lord has told us, in the plainest terms, that devotion not accompanied with these feel-

^b Eccles. v. 1.

¹ Ps. ciii. 1—6.

² Mat. xv. 7—10.

ings can never please God, nor be attended with any advantage to ourselves. "God is a Spirit; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth;" for the Father seeketh such to worship him^k.

3. It must be holy, according to the requisition of Scripture: "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! that is, in the most devout and becoming manner, as to the external mode of doing it; and inwardly, with a pure and undefiled mind, and with upright intentions to honour the Lord. In such a consecration of the heart to God, he discerns a real "beauty." Though the religious service of his people in his earthly courts is attended with many defects, yet he accounts himself honoured by their sincere devotions. "Whoso offereth praise, gloriifieth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I shew the salvation of God!"

And, further; holiness being a prominent feature of the Divine image, bestows a true dignity and beauty on those who cultivate it. Let us, then, pursue it with earnestness, in order that we may be acknowledged as "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty^m."

Moreover, as God looketh not on the outward appearance, but at the heartⁿ it is important ever to recollect, that we must take care to worship Him in a proper spirit and temper; for a want of right dispositions will assuredly mar our devotions, and cause them to be rejected by him. Observe, then, these general directions for the performance of religious duties, whether you are assembled with

^k John iv. 23, 24.

^m 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

ⁿ Psalm i. 23.

^o 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

Christians in the sanctuary of the Lord, or with your households in the closet.

4. Approach Jehovah with the profoundest humility and reverence. Endeavour to possess just conceptions of his immensity and glory on the one hand, and of your own insignificance and meanness on the other. Think of His unspotted righteousness, and contrast it with your own wickedness and unworthiness. Such views of Him, and of ourselves, will lay us in the very dust of abasement before him; and force every one of us to exclaim, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore, I abhor myself^o."

5. Draw nigh unto God with deep penitence of soul. A repentant state of mind is highly becoming in creatures like us, who have sinned "against him, in thought, word, and deed." He expects us to repent^p, if we would escape his avenging wrath. And this offering, though it cannot pay off the accumulated debt of our sins, and merit their forgiveness, is nevertheless, as a mark of genuine sorrow on account of them, highly agreeable to the Lord, who promises tokens of his peculiar regard to every true penitent^q.

6. Worship God in faith. "He that cometh before Him, to do him honour by his devotions, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." A firm persuasion both of his existence, and of his ability and readiness to bless us, if we truly serve him in the Gospel of his Son, is needful, to ensure the audience of our prayers, and the acceptance of our persons.

In all our approaches to him, let us maintain a

^o Job xlii. 5, 6.

^p Luke xiii. 3.

^q Isa. lxvi. 2.

deep conviction of our ruined state by nature; and pray that we may be "justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God^r."

7. Ardent love to God should accompany our devotions, to preserve them from formality and lukewarmness. Those acts of worship that are not inflamed by holy affection to God, can never ascend up with grateful odours before him; since they are devoid of that quality which, of all others, is required to render them acceptable.

8. Come before the Lord with a desire to know his will, and to put it into practice: because the avowed object of our going to the House of God is, to learn, from the lips of his ministering servants, what we must do to be saved, and how we must act so as to please him. Whenever, therefore, we make any fresh discovery of the Divine will concerning us, in the use of ordinances, we should promptly comply with it; since this is the way to induce the Almighty to communicate further degrees of saving light and wisdom to our souls.

We repeat, then, with a view to correct the errors of the formalist, who places the whole of acceptable worship in a round of duties in which his heart is no way engaged—and to prevent the careless soul from rushing irreverently into the presence of God, with strange and unhallowed fire^s—that if decency and respect be not united with spirituality, and sincerity, and holiness, and humility, and repentance, and faith, and love, and a wish to obey his revealed will, their worship, however splendid or costly, is but an abomination in the sight of God: yea, is nothing more than "as sounding brass,

^r 1 Cor. vi. 11.

^s Lev. x. 1—6.

or a tinkling cymbal;" which may arrest the ear of others by its noise, but can never profit their own souls. Seriously inquire, Reader, Do you thus worship the Lord, at church, and in your house and retirements? This scrutiny is necessary, whether you reflect on the advantages which accrue from the service of God, or the misery that will hereafter follow the neglect of it.

The benefits which flow from a life spent in the fear and worship of Almighty God are immensely great. He gives to his dutiful children and obedient servants a reward infinitely above the desert of their labours. Whilst they walk conformably to his word, he vouchsafes to them many gracious tokens of his approbation. In his courts, and in their closets, they enjoy a sweet intercourse with him, which at once delights and refines their souls: yea, he even grants them a blessed anticipation of a glorious immortality.

But who can adequately represent the blissful nature of those enjoyments which are prepared in heaven for the righteous? If "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him," oh what ineffable joy and delight must arise in their souls, who are permitted to behold God, to worship in his presence, and receive his fatherly caresses!

To possess this happiness, it is incumbent on every man who longs for that felicity which alone can satisfy the desires of his immortal soul, to strive to acquire that rich revenue of glory and honour, of which we have briefly spoken. On the contrary, the consequences that finally ensue a neglect of

the service of God are sufficiently tremendous to deter us from dishonouring him. God must ever consider those who disobey his authority, as avowed rebels; of whom he thus speaks: "Whoso despiseth me, shall be lightly esteemed." Thus, his displeasure abideth on them that hate him. But what fearful indignation will overtake them hereafter, when God shall set them at nought in the sight of his holy angels! How wretched will they be, whom he shall thus accost, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!"

Be persuaded, you who stand convicted of this heinous neglect, immediately to engage in His service. He demands it, as a right which he will not relinquish. Pray, therefore, that you may "have grace, whereby you may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear".

* 1 Sam. ii. 30.

* Heb. xii. 28.

LECTURE XXXIX.

ON OBEDIENCE TO GOD.

Acts v. 29.—*We ought to obey God, rather than men.*

It cannot be denied, that God, our Creator, has a right to exercise an absolute dominion over us, and that our subjection to his rightful authority is as necessary as it is beneficial. If we were to be held under no restraints, and to be allowed to act independently of his will, without fear of consequences, it is easy to see the mischief and disorder that would result from such a licence. Even amidst all the penal sanctions of the Divine law, men sin with a degree of boldness and hardihood which it is painful to witness: but, with what little remorse

would they perpetrate the most atrocious deeds, if conscience, and the terrors of a judgment to come, had no effect in restraining their vicious inclinations?

God, for the good government of the world, asserts his Sovereignty over man, by giving him laws for the direction of his conduct ; and he demands an unfeigned obedience thereto, on pain of his hottest displeasure. To such as stubbornly resist his power, he will at last say, " Bring hither those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me*."

If, then, we are at all desirous to gain His friendship, we shall be ready, when convinced of our past neglect of duty to God, to inquire, " Lord, what wilt thou have us to do ?" and we shall feel a great delight in complying with his sacred pleasure, to the full extent of our ability.

1. Obedience supposes the existence of some law or rule to which our behaviour should be conformed. God has prescribed the most holy and reasonable duties for our performance. In his word, he particularly specifies what we should do, and how we should demean ourselves, to obtain his approbation of our conduct. Let us, then, make his will, as revealed in the Scripture, our perpetual study**

Generally speaking, the commands and precepts which we are bound to obey are recorded in the two tables of the Divine Law, and more fully stated in the requirements of the Gospel. Whatever God there enjoins us to do, we should most willingly perform ; since his authority is quite sufficient to render the practice of it perfectly right, and absolutely expedient.

And what doth the Lord our God require of us ;

* Luke xix. 27.

** Psalm i. 2. xix. 7—14.

but to believe his word, and act agreeably thereto; to reverence his high commands, which enforce upon us the duty of loving, fearing, and serving him; of being holy, just, temperate, and merciful; and of behaving towards our neighbour with the same equity and kindness which we expect from him, under similar circumstances? This is the sum of our duty to God—and to man, for His sake; the subject-matter of all religious obedience. “And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He hath commanded us^b.”

But, as the manner and temper in which a religious act is performed greatly contribute to its being approved or rejected, it is of no small consequence for us to take care that we proceed to the discharge of our duty towards God in a proper frame of soul.

2. Let our obedience be performed from Scriptural motives.

As we may feel certain that God cannot require anything from us that is derogatory to his character, or which is harsh and unreasonable in itself, or which militates against our real welfare, it becomes our bounden duty, the moment we can ascertain his will, to yield an implicit obedience to it, without questioning its propriety or expediency. This deference is due to the command of God, who is too wise to err, and too just and good to enjoin compliance with what is improper or unnecessary.

And His commands should be cheerfully obeyed. No reluctance to bow to his will, no backwardness to execute it, when understood, must be visible in our temper; but, on the contrary, we should fly with

^b Deut. vi. 25.

seraphic zeal, with holy slacrity, to do whatsoever he enjoins us. And it is only such a prompt and ready obedience that God approves, and will hereafter acknowledge.

We discern a marked difference betwixt the service of a slave which is forced by the lash, and the dutiful obedience of a child to a beloved parent: the former is the offspring of fear; the latter, of affection. The same dissimilarity is seen in the religious service of a nominal and real Christian: the one is a constrained homage paid to God, not with a view to honour him, but to retain a quiet conscience, to drive away the fear of hell, and maintain an hypocritical expectation of heaven^{bb}: the other is a ready compliance with the Divine injunctions, the deliberate act of a willing mind, submitting itself to the authority of God, from a desire to give Him the glory due to his name.

Let us see to it, that our obedience to God is the result of right motives; which are essential to its acceptance by him. Gratitude and love to God should be the main-spring to actuate us to the practice of our duty to him: "We love Him, because He first loved us^c." Now, when a Christian calls to mind the incalculable blessings which the Almighty is continually bestowing on him—food, raiment, health, friends, strength, sleep, safety, and the continued use of his faculties—this view of the Divine goodness makes a lively impression on his heart. But, when he reckons up the whole sum of his debts and obligations to God, his gratitude is proportionably increased. When he remembers his impiety, and considers that God might have justly cut him off in his sins or left him under the delusion of

^{bb} Mark vi. 20. ^c 1 John iv. 19.

pride and unbelief; when he reflects that the Lord has covered all his iniquities, forgiven his offences, and created him in his own image, by which he is enabled "to comprehend, with all saints, the length, and breadth, the height, and depth of the love of Christ;" when he understands what reproach and misery the Lord of Life and Glory bore, to save his soul; and when, on the one side, he sees the fathomless abyss of woe from which he is preserved, and, on the other, the "exceeding eternal weight of glory ready to be revealed in him;" whilst he meditates on these things with an assurance of their certainty, he feels "that even the stones might well cry out against him," if he were not inflamed with a desire to make the best return to God in his power. "And he glories in confessing, also, that no slave is so completely the property of his master by purchase, as he is Christ's; nor any pensioner on royal bounty so obliged to honour the king for a rich undeserved provision, as he is to love and please God, both with soul and body, which are his." Hence, love to the Lord shines conspicuously in his whole deportment, and carries him forth to all the acts of a devout and religious life. Nor can a child so cheerfully comply with the orders of a parent, as he does with the commands of God: adopted into His family, and made a partaker of his Divine nature, "the love of Christ constraineth him;" like a mighty overwhelming tide, it bears him above all opposition, and leads him on to the performance of the most lively acts of gratitude to God.

3. Universal obedience to the Lord is expected from us. He charges us to keep the whole of his commandments, without preferring one to another,

"2 Cor. v. 14.

or leaving any branch of his will undone. We are not, then, at liberty to select some parts of his word for our observance, to the exclusion of the rest; but to honour and obey the whole of his righteous will. We are required to walk in the path of duty, not only when it is smooth and easy; and pleasant and safe, but even when the way is rough and strewn with thorns, when it thwarts our pride and self-love, and calls us to exercise self-denial, patience, and every passive grace; yea, when it demands the most dear and valuable sacrifice; even the surrender of life itself. Christ expects this compliant disposition from his disciples, for whom he has freely made the most noble sacrifices. "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."

In the same way that we esteem him the best servant who most willingly executes all our commands without reserve, so God estimates most highly the unfeigned obedience of those who are studious to shew their attachment to him, by an unlimited respect to the whole of his revealed will.

Of course, then, the constrained service of the worldling and the sinner, whose hearts are set on sensual objects; as well as the cold and unmeaning devotions of the formalist and the self-righteous hypocrite; can never please God, who "requires truth and integrity in the inward parts." The prayers and thanksgivings of such persons, with their most splendid religious actions, not springing from love to God, but from corrupt motives, are rejected by him, as the professions of enemies disaffected to his righteous government.

It is necessary for us to ascertain "whose we are,

Mark viii. 34.

and whom we serve." Have we right ideas of our obligations to God? Do we endeavour to obey His commands with sincerity and cheerfulness, and from a sense of gratitude for his manifold favours, as well as from a view of his excellencies? or, like slaves, do we obey him from compulsion, and not from choice? "If any man love God, the same is known of him*." Decide, then, in what state you are, as it respects God; whether you are living in conformity to his word, or in direct hostility and enmity against him.

4. Think upon the punishment which awaits disobedience. God has plainly told us what he would have us to do. And he demands nothing at our hands which his grace will not enable us to perform. Resistance to his lawful authority is a treasonable act, which cannot escape his vengeance. "Those servants, then, which knew their Lord's will, and prepared not themselves to execute it, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes†; the least of which will produce intolerable smart and anguish.

5. On the other hand, there is nothing wanting to allure us to obedience. The high rewards of the eternal state make a strong appeal to our self-love. And, surely, if the terrors of hell, and the joys of heaven, will not excite us "to run the race which is set before us," no motives merely human will be sufficient to prevail with us for that purpose.

Let the love of God, and the bliss which he has promised to his servants, fire us with a holy ambition to please him. "Be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*."

* 1 Cor. viii. 3. † Luke xii. 47. * 1 Cor. xv. 58.

LECTURE XLI.

ON GLORIFYING GOD.

1 Cor. vi. 20. *Therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

MAN was originally formed for the purpose of glorifying God, and of being for ever happy in the enjoyment of his favour. Every one of his creatures, whether animate or inanimate, rational or irrational, proclaims his wisdom, power, and goodness. But it is reserved for man, the most pre-eminent of God's works, to praise and to serve him in a manner the most effectual and pleasing; since he has abilities given him for the sublime employment, which the irrational animals do not possess. He, therefore, is imperiously called upon "to glorify God in his body and in his spirit, which are God's."

We give glory to the Almighty, when we honour his name and authority, and praise and admire his divine perfections, which render him worthy of the adoration of men and angels.

There is no one, however mean the station may be which he occupies in the scale of society, who cannot, in some humble degree, thus magnify the Lord. And when we reflect that we are answerable to Him for the use of our faculties, we should take care that none of them be perverted, or misapplied, or unemployed. As every situation in life presents some opportunities of usefulness, each one should ask himself; What are those talents which are committed to my care? How can I exert them most profitably? What can I do to honour God, promote His cause in the world, and serve the generation in which I live? And we should gladly avail ourselves of any facilities which we may pos-

sess, for accomplishing objects of so much importance.

1. Glorify the Lord, by the consecration of your thoughts to him. Thought is action in embryo ; and, according to its quality, shews the good or evil which a man meditates. Since the heart is become so corrupt, many are the impure and wicked cogitations which spring out of it*. How necessary is it, therefore, that the Spirit of God should sanctify the thoughts of our hearts, and give them a right direction !

If, then, we are desirous to honour God, by dedicating our souls to His service, we must not entertain, but drive away evil imaginations, when they arise, by fixing our minds on subjects that will improve them. Let our thoughts ascend up to God, and be employed in devout meditations on his holy word, which rightly instructs us with respect to his nature and perfections. Let our minds be engaged in devising plans for the promotion of his glory, in the salvation of sinners, and in projecting schemes to advance the welfare of our fellow-creatures. Thus our thoughts will be turned to a good account, and be productive of peace and satisfaction to ourselves.

2. We should glorify God by our words, which are the vehicle by which we convey our designs to others. Speech, therefore, is an important talent. It was not given to us that it might be applied to vicious, profane, or deceitful purposes ; but, that with it we might laud the name of God, sound forth his praises, and communicate knowledge and instruction to others. With our words, we should endeavour to discredit falsehood, and support and establish truth. When language is thus used, it is an instrument by which God is honoured, and the good of society ad-

vanced. The Apostle, therefore, with great reason, advises us "to let no corrupt communication proceed out of our mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers".

3. Let our actions and general conduct glorify God, who made us. In order to act conformably to the will of God, we must avoid doing any thing impious and wicked, because it dishonours him; and refrain from injuring others, either in their property or persons. But this negative goodness does not come up to the requirements of the Law; which enjoins us, whilst we abstain from iniquity, to practise universal righteousness. Let us do what we can to honour God, by studying to obey his will, and to walk in his ways with sincerity and delight. Nor let us forget, when we pray, "that His kingdom may come, and His will be done in earth as it is in heaven;" that it is a duty incumbent on us to exert ourselves, as much as possible, to spread the savour of his knowledge amongst all men, in order that they may understand what they are to believe, and to do, to be saved.

4. It is a sense of duty and regard to God which ought to stimulate us thus to honour him. It is the temper of mind in which a thing is done, that stamps a real value on the action. When, therefore, a Christian tries to discharge the particular duties which he owes to God and men, in the sphere wherein he moves, whether as a master, husband, father, son, or servant, he wishes it to be understood, that he is conscientious in his practice, not to gain the applause and commendation of his neighbours, but to please God, by a sincere devotion to his will.

" Ephes. iv. 29.

It is such a pious disposition that consecrates his whole behaviour, and makes it so pleasing to the Lord^b.

Let it be our uniform desire and endeavour thus to shew our obedience to God's commands, by an habitual fear and love of his name : then shall we honour him in the sight of men ; and our conduct will be sure to attract his favourable notice and regard.

5. Let not those, whose hearts are engrossed with the pleasures and vanities of the world, who pay a slavish deference to its sinful maxims and practices—let not those, who walk after the vain imaginations of their own minds, and exclude God as much as they can from their thoughts—let not those, who live either in open or secret transgression, in the omission of known duties, or in the commission of wilful deliberate offences—in a word, let none of those who despise the Gospel, and refuse to obey its precepts, conceive that their conduct passes unnoticed. God's eye is upon all their ways. He sees their devotion—that it is to sin and folly, and not unto him. They consecrate their talents ; but it is to the service of the Devil, who will give them a recompence, according to their deserts.

But is it no crime, and does no punishment await men's refusal “ to glorify God, in whose hand their breath is, and whose are all their ways^{bb} ?” Yes ; to withhold the honour due to His name, and to keep back our best service from him, is an act of robbery and rebellion and treason and ingratitude, of which creatures, bound by so many obligations to him, should blush to be guilty.

And if, in defiance to his threatening, we persist in desecrating and polluting our souls by acts of impiety, and by a neglect of our duty to God, we shall

^b Ephes. vi. 5—9.

^{bb} Dan. v. 23.

experience, at last, a tragical end: instead of that honour which he will confer on his servants, we shall be consigned to remediless woe. "What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy?"

6. The happiness which a life of sanctity and devotion to God affords, may well stimulate every one to enter sincerely upon it. The tranquil hopes and joys and pleasures of a good conscience, which attend the godly man, even in this disturbed state, and the rapturous felicity which he will attain on his dismissal from the world, render his privileges and condition truly enviable.

To animate their faith and hope, to preserve them in a patient continuance in well-doing, the Lord makes this gracious promise to **THEM** that glorify him:—"Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high; because he hath known my name: He shall call upon me, and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble: I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation."

* 1 Cor. iii. 16; 17.

* Psalm xci. 14—16.

LECTURE XLI.

ON IMITATING CHRIST.

Mat. ix. 9. *And Jesus saith unto him, Follow me,*

God is, in himself, the source of all moral and underrived goodness. In him every excellence resides, without any defect. He is, therefore, the proper object of imitation, as well as of worship and love.

When Christ was manifested in the flesh, he exhi-

bited a holy example, which his people will do well to mark and copy; for what he shewed himself to be, in the character of our Mediator, we must be in some measure, if indeed we would be his disciples, and obtain a share of the honours of his kingdom.

1. A care, then, to imitate the example of Christ, is a principle trait in the character of a Christian.

Upon him, as upon a perfect model, he fixes his eyes; just as a limner looks stedfastly on a beautiful original, which he wishes to copy with the greatest exactness; and whose likeness and spirit, by persevering attention, are transfused into his own soul. It is the business of a Christian to place before him, every day, Jesus Christ—his bright, all-glorious, and holy exemplar; that, by a devout study of His walk and behaviour in the world, he may know how to regulate his own conduct before God and men.

2. Think, then, of the varied excellencies which shone forth so illustriously in your Lord and Saviour. Remember his unfeigned love of righteousness, shewn in all his endeavours to glorify his Father, to conform to the Law, and to instruct his hearers. Call to mind his unconquerable hatred to sin, evinced by all he said and did. Recollect the constellation of graces visible in him, whilst he tabernacled on earth; his self-denial and patience, and resignation to the will of Heaven on the most trying occasions; his forbearance and meekness, under all the insults of his enemies; his readiness to forgive injuries, and, instead of retaliation, to render good for evil, and blessing for railing.

Now Christians are expressly commanded to tread in the steps of their Lord, by Him whom they wish to obey. “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one

another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you *."

Such an injunction should make every temper which is contrary to the mind of Christ, appear, to a believer, deformed and criminal. He should hate the hypocrisy of professing to be a follower of Christ, without conformity to his image; which manifests itself by a degree of every grace which He exemplified, and in hatred, not of one evil disposition, but of every iniquitous practice and temper and desire.

3. The holiness of a Christian cannot be carried to too great a length; for it is expected that every member of Christ's mystical body should shine as much as possible, in a striking resemblance of His moral excellency. "Be ye perfect, even as your Father, which is in heaven, is perfect"^b And the Apostle declares, that a believing contemplation of the Lord Jesus, in his person and character, has a transforming effect on the mind. "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

4. This imitation of Christ becomes more easy from the love which his real disciples bear towards him; for we have much pleasure in imitating the manners of those whom we admire, especially if, in addition to their virtues, their generosity and kindness to us have been remarkable. "If this be the case between creatures whose best favours are but of small value, and amongst whom the brightest characters are very imperfect, how much more powerfully ought a Christian's heart to be affected, in pondering the riches of a Saviour's unspeakable love and kindness!" He should be drawn, by a holy attraction, to imitate

* John xiii. 13—16.

^b Matt. v. 48.

* 2 Cor. iii. 18.

Him, who is his God and Lord, and to whom he owes all his hopes of life and salvation.

5. Let us seriously examine ourselves on this point of our duty to God; for if our affection to Jesus be not such as constrains us to imitate him in every thing where he is imitable by us, we may certainly conclude that we are none of his. If we desire his blessing, we should immediately seek those tempers which he approves.^c

Do you then pray for, and strive to have implanted in your souls, those graces for which Christ, the Head of the Church, was so much distinguished? Do you “hunger and thirst after righteousness;” and, like Jesus, do you make it your “meat and drink to do the will of God?” Do you, like him, discover a hatred to all iniquity; not committing it wilfully yourselves, nor conniving at it in others? Do you crucify the lusts and evil affections of your depraved nature, by denying yourselves, and taking up the cross? Are you careful to imitate the submission of Christ to the Divine will, by a patient endurance of those sufferings which are inseparable from the present state of trial? In imitation of the blessed Jesus, do you display a readiness to forgive rather than to resent, to overlook rather than to punish, the insults and injuries offered by your bitterest foes; maintaining a spirit of charity, and not of revenge; of conciliation, and love, and not of unkindness and malevolence towards any, even the worst of human beings^d? If we are not habitually influenced by a prevailing desire thus to resemble Christ, we do not belong to him; but are serving another master, whose interests militate against the glory of our Redeemer.

6. Lest, however, we should make the righteous.

^c Gal. v. 22—26.

^d Col. iii. 12, 13.

sad, whom God would have to rejoice, it must be stated, that, after the sincerest endeavours to copy the holy example of our Lord, the most zealous and upright Christian will be ready to admit, with "shame and confusion of face," that, so far from coming up to the standard of perfection, his highest acts of devotion, and love, and obedience, are so defective, both in motive and end; so marred by a large admixture of sin, which attaches to every thing he does; that, instead of confiding in his own imperfect conformity to Jesus, for acceptance with God; he confesses that he is but "an unprofitable servant," and founds all his hopes of salvation and glory on the atonement and righteousness of Immanuel.

Whilst, then, the genuine follower of Christ will lie thus abased at the foot of the cross, and cling to it for pardon and peace, he will still derive from that very trust the strongest incitements to imbibe the spirit and tread in the footsteps of his Divine Master, who hath loved him even unto death. Impelled by gratitude, he will say, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" And then he will demonstrate his attachment, by trying to walk with him in the path of regeneration.

7. Such an imitation of the holy Jesus commends itself to our consideration by the most powerful arguments. In proportion as our minds advance in righteousness and purity, we resemble God, and his Son Jesus Christ; and, therefore, to attain that likeness, is the greatest measure of perfection and happiness of which we are capable.

Ah oh, how great is the satisfaction which attends it! Whilst engaged in the very act of cultivating holy dispositions and Christian virtues, we enjoy a sacred pleasure which affords a sufficient reward for the work of faith. And if our thoughts are di-

rected forward to the bliss indescribable, reserved in heaven for those who are conformed to Christ, what an incentive does it hold forth to imitate him; as much as possible, in all the practicable virtues of his devout life!

8. What then, except the worst kind of infatuation, can make so many willing to forego all this revenue of celestial joy, for "the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season"^{dd}, and are afterwards succeeded by a remorse and sorrow that will embitter an endless existence in the world to come? Know, O transgressors! that sin likens you unto your father the Devil; and if it remain unpardoned, it will consign you, with him and his angels, to everlasting fire. This thought suggests the most forcible motives for immediate repentance, and for following Christ in righteousness and holiness all the days of your life.

^{dd} Heb. xi. 25.

LECTURE XLII.

ON THE FEAR OF GOD.

Matt. x. 28. Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

1. "FEAR is one of the chief springs which govern the human mind. Some suitable object, therefore, is necessary to engage our fear, that we may be kept from the dominion of imaginary terrors respecting things little to be dreaded, whilst we continue duly sensible to impressions from what is of the greatest moment."

In this manner, fear is regulated in the breast of a believer. He considers that secondary causes

are only instruments in the hands of God, subserving his will and designs; and therefore he "sanctifies the Lord God in his heart, making Him his fear and his dread,"—a God who is too wise to mistake, too just to do wrong, too mighty to be resisted, and too good to be known, without adoration of his name, and self-abasement before him.

2. The fear of a Christian produces no uneasy feelings in his soul towards God. It is not the terror of a slave, dreading the severe frown of a cruel master; nor that amazement of natural fear which deprives a man of the succours of reason, and of the power of acting in difficult emergencies; but it is the salutary fear of a creature towards a merciful Creator; of a sinner saved by the most astonishing acts of love and compassion; of a dutiful child towards his affectionate parent. "In the same proportion, therefore, as he increases in knowledge and love, he will increase also in the fear of God; for they are inseparable from each other." The inhabitants of heaven cry out, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints! Who shall not fear thee, O Lord! and glorify thy name^b?"

It is, then, a noble ingenuous fear of God which governs his people; a holy principle, which is the offspring of the warmest love, and which makes them afraid lest, by any acts of disobedience, they should lose the manifestation of his regard, which is better to them than life itself.

3. The united operation of these seemingly opposite graces is necessary to complete the character of a man of God. Love to him excites filial confidence, whilst it constrains to obedience: fear, under its

^a Isa. viii. 13.

^b Rev. xiv. 3, 4.

direction, restrains the soul from sinning presumptuously. Religious fear, then, under the guidance of Divine love, is the only motive that can induce us to abstain from the practice of those sins which are condemned in the Scripture—because they dishonour God: and it is the combined influence of these principles that sweetly controuls our hearts, and inclines them cheerfully to perform whatsoever Jehovah would have us to do; from the consideration, that such obedience is pleasing to him, and profitable to ourselves. Hence, a holy fear is inculcated in Scripture, as a governing motive to a religious life. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.”

Consider its influence on the Patriarchs and holy men in ancient times. “Enoch walked with God;” but it was the fear of His name that preserved him from being tainted with the general corruption. “Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation; and Noah walked with God^a,” but he feared the Lord, and faithfully warned the ungodly world, in which he lived, to repent, lest the threatened vengeance of Heaven should overtake them^b. The three worthies, Shadrac, Meshac, and Abednego, confidently braved the fiery furnace, from a reverential fear of displeasing God^c. And Daniel, the servant of the Living God, by whom he was greatly beloved, went down without horror into the lions’ den, rather than displease Him, and wound his conscience by an omission of known duty^d.

It is the same holy fear which, in modern times, prompts good men to obey the Divine will, amidst

^a Psalm iii. 10.

^b Dan. iii. 1—30.

^c Gen. vi. 9.

^d ib. vi. 1—28.

^e 2 Pet. 5.

persecution and reproach ; saying, with Joseph, in the hour of temptation, " How can we do this great wickedness, and sin against God¹ !"

4. But it is morally certain, on the contrary, that all, in whose hearts the fear of God does not predominate, " will fall into various temptations and snares of Satan, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition¹." Of the truth of this position, no other proofs need be adduced, than the profligacy and corruption of some, and the carelessness and irreligion of others.

Cherish this grace in your bosoms. It is the best preservative from sin, and a faithful guardian of the soul.

5. They who do not possess it, should pray to have it implanted in their souls, as the most powerful incentive to a holy life, and as a guide to a happy death and immortality.

¹ Gen. xxxix. 9.

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 9.

LECTURE XLIII.

ON HUMILITY.

Mat. v. 4. *Blessed are the poor in spirit ; for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.*

1. THIS is a Divine grace, which is essential to the Christian character, and stamps a peculiar excellency on it. By humility, I mean a judgment formed of our character and conduct agreeably to the word of God ; which instructs us to entertain a proper sense of our wickedness, corruption, and weakness.

A believer often exhibits to his own mind a view of the greatness and Majesty of God, and the comparative meanness of all created things in His sight.

“He sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers. Behold! the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold! he taketh up the isles as a very little thing^a.” This conception of the glorious power and immensity of the Lord, together with a recollection that his being, as well as every thing which he possesses, was first received and is now held in dependence on him, abates the self-importance and self-exaltation of a believer, and makes him feel himself to be as nothing before the infinite Creator.

2. A comparison of his conduct with the perfect Law of God has a humiliating tendency. The Christian sees that this holy rule of life and manners condemns every deviation from the will of God, even in thought and inclination, as a sin deserving his anger. Thus, a review of every part of his past and present conduct will suggest reasons for self-abasement. He knows that every benefit lays him under a fresh obligation to glorify God, and that every talent demands a suitable improvement. And when he reflects that he must shortly “give an account of his stewardship^b”; and, at the same time, is conscious of not having made just returns to his generous Benefactor, and of not having made due improvement of his time and advantages; instead of being tempted to indulge in pride, he covers himself with shame and confusion, saying, “O Lord, pardon me! for I am an unprofitable servant.”

3. Further: he discovers a mixture of sin and defilement even in his best duties and services; and hence he feels his need of repentance, of mercy, and of the atoning blood of Christ, in every action of

^a Isa. xl. 15—23.

^b Luke xvi. 2.

his life. He dares not even venture before the mercy-seat of God to offer up his prayers for forgiveness, nor indulge a hope of happiness, but in the name of Christ, His beloved Son. Indeed, he is convinced that "it is of the Lord's mercies he is not consumed, because His compassions fail not *."

How can they who live under the influence of such sentiments have any other feelings, respecting themselves and their performances, than those of the deepest humility? Whatever difference Christians perceive in themselves from the world around them, they are led to attribute to a Divine influence on their minds; so that they see cause enough for gratitude to God, but none for pride and self-complacency.

4. Again: a believer is humbled when he compares his behaviour with the perfect example of Christ, and the requisitions of the Gospel. He does not find in himself that ardent love to God and man, that devotion to his glory, that meekness and charity and holiness so observable in his Saviour; nor does he exercise, in the degree required of him, those active and passive graces for which he should labour to be distinguished. The discoveries which he makes of his short-comings, his numerous defects, omissions, and actual sins, force him to lie constantly at the footstool of his Maker, and to cry out, "Behold, I am vile!" "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord! for in thy sight shall no man living be justified *."

5. Moreover, a conviction of his ignorance produces the same poverty of mind. He knows, by experience, that he is prone to mistake, even in matters of the highest concern to his soul. He, therefore, confesses his want of wisdom; and is most

* Lam. iii. 22, 23.

* Job xl. 4.

* Psalm cxliii. 2.

ready to ask it of God, with simplicity and fervency; saying, "O God, I am unable to guide myself; for I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man, that walketh, to direct his steps^f." Do Thou, therefore, undertake to instruct and lead me. "What I see not, teach Thou me^g."

And though a Believer, thus taught of God, will not "call any man master on earth," or implicitly adopt all the opinions of any uninspired person, but refer every instruction, doctrine, and counsel, to the word of truth; yet he will always be desirous to learn, even from an inferior, or from his enemies themselves, if he can but obtain the light and information which he seeks.

6. Again; a Christian is deeply sensible of his own weakness. Conscious of his inability to keep himself, he will say, 'Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe^h.' "Lead me not into temptation." "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip notⁱ." Indeed, his past errors and failings have convinced him that he has no power in himself; either to resist temptation, face dangers, endure tribulations, or perform duties; "and that he can only be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might^j."

7. The same temper manifests itself in his conduct towards his brethren. Whilst he judges himself severely for his own faults, he will be candid in estimating the opinions and conduct of his brethren. Agreeably to the Apostle's maxim, "he will esteem others better than himself^k," "in honour preferring them^l." Thus, instead of aspiring to pre-eminence, he will occupy the lowest place, rather than stand in

^f Jer. x. 23.

^g Job xxxiv. 32.

^h Psalm cxix. 117.

ⁱ Psalm xvii. 5.

^j Ephes. vi. 10.

^k Phil. ii. 3.

^l Rom. xii. 10.

the way of those who are wiser and better than himself.

8. Now, as every branch of the Christian temper and character depends on this, and springs from it as its proper root, it is, on this very account, highly commended in Scripture. "All of you, be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time^m." According to this exhortation, pride, ambition, self-exaltation, boasting, and contempt of others, should be put away, as inconsistent with the spirit of godliness. And a deep sense of our depravity, failings, and liability to err and backslide, should produce within us that poor and contrite spirit, "which, in the sight of God, is of great price." This divine temper will keep us low in our own estimation; which is really necessary; for as man fall by pride, he must rise again by humility.

^m 1. Pet. v. 5, 6.

LECTURE XLIV.

ON SUBMISSION TO GOD.

1 Sam. iii. 18. *And he said, It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth him good.*

HE, who made all things, and governs them by the dispensations of His will, is entitled to our highest confidence and esteem. All His ways are righteous. It is fit, therefore, that we should implicitly yield up ourselves to His wise directions. "Submit yourselves to God^a," is the command of Scripture.

^a James iv. 7.

This submission is directly opposed to that self-will and desire of independence, which prevail in the heart of fallen man, and are the cause of his rebellion against his Maker.

1. The grace of which we now treat, like every other, is the effect of regeneration; producing in a believing soul a disposition to submit to the teaching of God. It is not enough for us to possess the Scriptures: we must have light from Heaven, to understand them. It is a great proof, therefore, of advancement in the spiritual life, when we distrust the sufficiency of our own powers; solicit the Holy Ghost to lead us into all truth; and give up ourselves to His guidance, just as a scholar does to the directions of his master; in order that we may learn those truths, which are as "a lamp to our feet, and a light unto our path".

2. Submission to His authority is required from us. God has an undisputed right to our best homage and affections. We should deem "His service perfect freedom," "His yoke easy," and "His ways, paths of pleasantness and peace." His will must be acknowledged just, by which he condemns sin, and approves of righteousness.

We should cheerfully submit, not only to the peculiar method by which he saves sinners, through the righteousness of his adorable Son; but, also, to his holy ordinances, as means appointed by him for communicating that grace which enables us to do him honour.

3. Submission to the providence of God is expected from us, with regard to his management of temporal affairs. "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." We must not quarrel, then,

^b Psalm cxix. 105.

with his appointments, or fancy we could order things more judiciously than he has arranged them. This spirit would certainly convict us of the greatest ignorance, as well as impiety. It is not fit that we, who cannot understand the nature or the reasons of the Divine conduct, should capriciously sit in judgment upon it, or "say unto God, What doest Thou?"

Our duty is, to acquiesce most fully in all the methods by which He is pleased to restrain vice, and to promote virtue and peace and good order in society.

4. As consistent Christians, we shall study at all times "to submit ourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the King, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

5. We should equally submit to the especial and particular dispensations of his providence, in respect to our own situation, difficulties, and peculiar circumstances in life. God knows best what is most adapted to promote our real welfare, and to subserve his own designs in the government of the world. To bring about his purposes, he qualifies different persons for the discharge of the various duties of life.

Has he permitted us to be fixed in some lawful calling? or do we occupy an inferior station in society? It will be most presumptuous in us to repine at our lot; or to envy others, or to wish to exchange

• 1 Pet. ii. 15.

situations with them ; for which, perhaps, we are not qualified ; and which, if we were to force ourselves into them, might occasion our ruin and disgrace.

6. Further ; it is God who maketh rich or poor. He judges it right to give to some a larger portion of worldly good, than to others. Every one should be thankful for what he possesses, knowing that he has abundantly more than he deserves. Should, therefore, discontent with the provision which God has allotted us, or an ambitious desire to have what he withholds, ever arise within our bosoms, we should repress them, as rebellion against God ; and learn to be satisfied with such things as we have, and not to covet the property of others.

7. Finally ; a devout Christian will bow with unlimited submission to the will of God, on all occasions, yea, even under the severest chastisements of his hand. Whether God visit us with sharp afflictions and trials, or call us to suffer reproach and persecution for his cause, or deprive us of friends, or reduce us to poverty, or chasten us with sickness and disease, we must acquiesce without a murmur. However His dealings with us may oppose our narrow and selfish views, it will be incumbent on us to justify and approve of them, as the result of unbounded wisdom, goodness, and love. This complete resignation to the Divine will is a high attainment in religion ; and a measure of this temper is necessary, to shew our devotion to God, who is entitled to unreserved obedience from his children.

What an example of patience and acquiescence in the will of God did our Saviour display ! Notwithstanding the taunts and insults of his enemies provoked him to speak, yet, “when he was reviled,

he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him who judgeth righteously^d." And when his last conflict drew near, in which he was going to endure a kind of death as painful as it was ignominious, his soul patiently submitted to the stroke; whilst he said, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" "Not my will, but Thine be done."

8. It is clear, that the patience, contentment, resignation, and submission, of which we have briefly discoursed, are not to be mistaken for those counterfeit appearances of them which are seen in natural men. Separated from the grace of God in the heart, subduing it to His reasonable service, such holy tempers cannot be found in any of the fallen sons of Adam.

Oh that you, whose souls are not conformed to the righteous will of Jehovah, may seek to have them renewed in holiness! then you will not only honour him by a compliance with his commands, but reverence his will by a cheerful and unconstrained submission to all his holy dispensations.

^d 1 Pet. ii. 23.

• John xviii. 11.

LECTURE XLV.

ON AFFIANCE IN GOD.

Isaiah xxv. 4. Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.

THE minds of unenlightened men are filled with unbelief and distrust of God: they can place no confidence in a Being whom they neither know, nor admire, nor serve. This is the reason why, in time of adversity or sickness, worldly people fly from God,

to trust in lying vanities "which cannot profit nor deliver".

The grace of God alters this corrupt bias, and corrects this estrangement of the soul from him, by bringing it back to a fiducial reliance on his name, and disposing it to honour his word by an unshaken belief in its truth. When, therefore, the heart is renewed in righteousness, a man is enabled to exercise a sincere confidence in God as his father and friend, believing that he will fulfil all those promises in which he has caused him to put his trust. God has most solemnly engaged, by oath and covenant, to save his people; and, for this end, to withhold no good thing from them^a.

1. With a view to promote the prosperity of their souls, he pledges himself to increase their knowledge of Divine truths, and to carry on and complete their sanctification. He promises to defeat all the designs of Satan against them, to succour them in temptation, and to bring them safely through every difficulty, which the world, the flesh, and the Devil can place in their way; in order that he may fix them in his holy habitation above, where joy and honour will be their everlasting portion^b.

2. Again: God has engaged to provide for their sustenance. Food and raiment convenient for his people are ensured to them by the "covenant which is ordered in all things and sure." He will also shield his saints from danger, and grant them protection and deliverance in the hour of distress and perplexity.

Now, seeing God has thus bound himself to advance the happiness of his chosen servants, it is the province of faith to rely on his ability and willingness.

^a 1 Sam. xii. 21. ^b Psalm lxxxiv. 11, 12. ^c Isa. lx. 19, 20.

to fulfil these engagements. And it has the strongest reasons for such confidence, from a consideration of his character ; a particular trait in which, is faithfulness to his word. " God is not a man, that he should lie ; neither the son of man, that he should repent : hath he said, and shall he not do it ? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good ^b ? "

3. And, further, an experience of his past goodness lays a foundation for our trust. How numerous the favours, how rich the blessings, which our gracious Benefactor has heaped upon us ! Can we be so ungrateful as to forget these instances of his kindness, or refuse to make them a ground of future affiance in him ? Shall we dishonour our faithful God, by suspecting his love and care for us, when he hath given such strong proofs of his attention to our welfare ? It is by reasonings like these, accompanied with the aid of Divine grace, that the sin of unbelief, so dishonourable to the Almighty, is conquered in the heart of a true Christian. And though, in the hour of extreme trouble and temptation, he may feel afraid, and give into doubts, yet his trust in Jehovah remains unaltered. Yes, however dark and gloomy his prospects may be, however great and severe the trials with which the faith of his devout soul may have to struggle, yet he can say, " I will trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon my God ^c . " Though he may be like a vessel driven from her moorings, and tossed by each successive wave, yet he will still confide in his Almighty Friend ; saying, " The Lord of Hosts is with me ; the God of Jacob is my refuge ^d . " And thus he will survive every storm ; and at length reach those shores of eternal peace, where

^b Num. xxiii. 19.

^c Isa. l. 10.

^d Psalm xlv. 1—7.

sorrow cannot pursue him any more^{dd}. He cannot open a single page of Scripture in which he does not find some circumstance or promise to encourage his confidence, and strengthen his heart. Thus he goes forward, "hoping against and beyond hope." Assured that "light is sown for the righteous, and joyful gladness for such as are true-hearted," he comforts himself in God, by saying, "Though heaviness may endure for a night, yet joy cometh in the morning."

4. Again; as a believer advances in grace and the knowledge of God, his own experience strongly confirms his trust; because all that help and succour and comfort, which the promises encouraged him to expect, he has seen accomplished, both in himself and in others. In a variety of instances, he has tried the word of the Lord to the uttermost; and every experiment has served to establish his confidence in an unchanging, covenant-keeping God.

From such evidence, he sees that it is good for him to put his trust in the Lord, in the darkest seasons, when the light of reason fails, and all things seem to make against him; for faith teaches him to rest upon the promise, that "things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." And though the evil motions of unbelief in his breast are far from being destroyed, yet they are always lamented, resisted, and at length put to flight; so that temptations, afflictions, and calamities of the worst kind, are submitted to, as wholesome medicines administered for the purification and happiness of his soul. Hence he acknowledges "it is good

^{dd} Rev. xxii. 3—6. * Psalm xxx. 5. ' Rom. viii. 28.

that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord^a." And in this temper of cheerful affiance in God, he trusts in him, until he arrives at "the haven of undisturbed repose, where his soul would be."

Examine thyself, Reader: canst thou venture, in this spirit of faith, to cast thyself on the God of Jacob for help and deliverance in the moment of sorrow and danger? Perhaps, instead of this child-like confidence in the Lord, you either distrust him altogether, or presumptuously expect his aid and blessing in the way wherein it cannot be found. Know, that unbelief is the cause of your alienation from him: this darkens the eye of your mind, so that you do not behold his claims to your love and confidence.

Now, you cannot be guilty of a sin which cries more loudly to God for vengeance, than this criminal fear and suspicion and distrust of Him who hath given you so much cause to honour his fidelity. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. He that believeth not God, hath made Him a liar^b."

5. Besides, is it not desirable, in the day of trouble and in the hour of death, to have a refuge whereunto we may fly for comfort and hope? Afflictions will assault you in this vale of tears, and death must shortly visit you. And what can you do without solace in the one case, and mercy and hope in the other? And who can administer these blessings, but the very God whom you have forsaken?

Pray for a Scriptural trust in him. Seek, in the first place, pardon of your past neglect, and a knowledge of the character and salvation of the Lord. Whilst this experience of his loving-kindness will

^a Lam. iii. 26.

^b 1 John v. 9, 10.

preserve you from the false trust of nominal Christians, it will inspire you with the confidence of his dear children, who cry, "Abba, Father." In his bosom they pour their sorrows; and by him they are assuaged. To Him they look for succour; and are not disappointed. He has promised "never to leave nor forsake them;" and he will not fail to be their God and happiness for ever.

Pray, then, ye who know him not, that, in imitation of His people, you may confide in his goodness, honour his faithfulness, and continue in the enjoyment of his love. An affiance thus grounded on the covenant of God cannot deceive us; "because he hath never failed them that seek him¹."

¹ Psalm ix. 10.

ON SOCIAL DUTIES; OR, THE TEMPERS OF A CHRISTIAN TOWARDS HIS FELLOW-CREATURES.

LECTURE XLVI.

ON A SINCERE REGARD TO TRUTH.

Ephes. iv. 25. *Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour; for we are members one of another.*

WE have already observed the effects of Christian doctrines in producing conformity to the will of God. It remains for us to shew how they should regulate our behaviour towards mankind. It is their uniform design to produce in us that "love which is the fulfilling of the Law," both as it respects God and our neighbour^a.

Now, were the command of Christ, "that we should love one another," universally obeyed, the Church would be a feeble representation of heaven,

^a Rom. xiii. 10.

and there would be a constant interchange of goodwill amongst its several members. But it is to be deplored, that only a small number of the great body of professing Christians have ever lived in entire subjection to this law of love. "Nevertheless, it is the noble peculiarity of a real disciple of Christ to behave towards every man as he would wish to have all men act towards himself; and to stand as much distinguished by right dispositions towards men, as by faith, love, and devotion towards God."

The Believer proves himself to be an invaluable blessing to society, not only by the influential example of a pious life, but also by maintaining, with a holy constancy, the important doctrines of the everlasting Gospel. We can never, therefore, promote the good of men so extensively, as by inducing them to embrace the religion of Christ, which saves their souls from death, and makes them shine as the lights and ornaments of the world.

Veracity is one of the great principles which connect men together in society, and the only foundation of mutual confidence. Let this barrier be broken down, and lying, and dishonesty, and falsehood, will rush in with violence, and destroy all harmony and trust betwixt man and man. It is no wonder, therefore, that God should mark the want of sincerity and truth with a just stigma of reproach, and approve of upright conduct as that which is peculiarly estimable in his sight. "Lying lips are abomination to the Lord; but they that deal truly are his delight^b."

Truth, then, is a precious jewel, which all who desire to live righteously and peaceably must maintain, and cherish in their hearts. Such is the Divine

^b Prov. xii. 22.

command:—"Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour; for we are members one of another."

1. Strictly adhere to truth in your conversation with others, at all times. When you relate facts, let your narration of all the circumstances attending them be faithful. Do not varnish them over with false ornaments, which may mislead or deceive others; neither exaggerate, nor diminish, but state them as they really occurred, to the best of your knowledge and belief.

Pay the strictest regard to truth in the opinions which you express of others. Shun adulation and flattery in your addresses, as a despicable engine of deceit. Do not compliment any one upon his possessing excellencies not belonging to him; neither speak to him as if you would lead him to believe that you entertain an esteem for his character and person which is not founded in sincerity. Such artifices, though so common "amongst the refinements of the polite and in the commerce of the world, are a species of detestable hypocrisy and dissimulation, in the judgment of God, *who requireth integrity in the inward parts*, and will punish the breach of it as a heavy offence against his law."

No real Christian can trifle with so sacred a matter as truth, for the sake of a jest, or a humorous tale, or a compliment; much less to gratify anger, malice, or avarice; or to indulge in flattery, slander, and calumny. On the contrary, he will studiously avoid all prevarication and deceitful language, because it has a tendency to lead men into error; remembering, in obedience to the injunction of Christ, "to let his communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay;

* Ephes. iv. 25.

knowing that whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil^d."

He will maintain the same reverence for the truth, when lawfully cited to bear testimony on oath, in a court of justice, respecting any occurrence which he has noticed. He will not injure his greatest enemy, "by bearing false witness against him," to procure his death, or punishment, or loss. In speaking of his offence, he will not magnify it by false colouring, nor conceal any favourable circumstance in the case, by equivocating language. On the contrary, to secure the great ends of justice, which demands the protection of the innocent, and the punishment of the guilty, a conscientious disciple of Christ will declare, in compliance with the law of the land, "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," without fear, partiality, or malevolence. "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour^e." Of course, then, perjury, or a false testimony borne against another, with a view to affect his life, character, or property, is so heinous a breach of the Divine commandment, that every man who dreads the wrath or values the favour of God will tremble to approach it, though at ever so great a distance. "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths^f," "by swearing in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness^g."

Lying, too, of every species, which is so scandalously common, is a glaring breach of the law of

^d Mat. v. 37.

^e Mat. v. 33.

^f Lev. xix. 15.

^g Jer. iv. 2.

God. No excuse can be offered to justify a practice which is a total abuse of the confidence which our neighbour reposes in us, independent of the great mischief which it occasions. Christ denounces all liars, as being "the children of their father, the Devil^b;" and declares, "they shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstoneⁱ."

2. Truth in our conversation must be coupled with sincerity, in making and performing our engagements and promises. It is a mark of the most palpable insincerity, when, under professions of friendship, a man raises expectations in others which he has neither the power nor the intention of gratifying. Ashamed of such dishonourable and criminal deceit, a sincere Christian feels himself bound to observe the utmost punctuality and fidelity in all his engagements, even when the performance of them may be inconvenient, or injurious to him. A true citizen of Zion is "one who, though he sweareth to his own hurt, changeth notⁱⁱ;" but will certainly fulfil his promises and contracts, if it be required, and practicable; provided he was not deceived in the grounds on which he made them, and no command of God be violated thereby.

"When, therefore, you make a promise to confer a benefit, or to do some kind office for another, you should consider, that the right and possession of the thing promised does, in conscience, really pass from you to the appointed receiver of it; and that, without his leave, you have no more power to recal it, than you have to cancel a legal bond, until its conditions are all fulfilled: and, consequently, you will esteem yourself obliged to perform your word, though

^b John viii. 44.

ⁱ Rev. xxi. 8.

ⁱⁱ Psalm xv. 4.

it may be much to your prejudice, in every instance where you have made a promise ; unless some specified conditions not fulfilled, or something concealed, vacate its obligation." In every case of this kind you will study the most undisguised sincerity ; and thus demonstrate, by the rectitude of your actions, that you live under the influence of the Gospel which you profess.

Your motives to the discharge of this duty will be superior to those which actuate men destitute of the fear and love of God. They advocate sincerity, because it is the cement of society, and the only basis of mutual confidence. How weak and inefficient are such motives, when opposed to the violent corruption and selfishness of the heart, under temptation to unjust gain, by the sacrifice of honesty and truth !

Let the command of God, who delights in truth and righteousness, be your incentive to this as well as every other duty. " These are the things that ye shall do, saith the Lord ; Speak ye every man truth to his neighbour^k,"

Further ; when the Holy Ghost renews our hearts, he implants in them a love of righteousness and truth, an hatred to deceit and iniquity. It is not possible, therefore, to be a Christian, and, at the same time, be false and insincere, for the sake of any temporal advantage whatever. Indeed, so long as we maintain a wish to honour the authority of God, and a fear of incurring his awful displeasure, we shall never think we can meet with any evil great enough to deter, or bribe sufficient to make us violate the rules of truth and sincerity.

^k Zech. viii. 16, 17.

LECTURE XLVII.

ON THE LOVE AND PRACTICE OF JUSTICE AND HONESTY.

Rom. xii. 17. *Provide things honest in the sight of all men.*

1. JUSTICE, properly administered according to law and reason, is the guardian of our lives, property, and rights. She sits on the throne of judgment, as the protectress of innocence, and the avenger of guilt. So necessary is this virtue to the very existence and welfare of society, that without a due regard to it the affairs of a State cannot be peaceably and orderly conducted. Where private and public rights are not duly respected, injustice, oppression, fraud, rapine, and robbery, must abound, with all their dire attendants. The necessity of justice to the well-being of a community made an Heathen moralist assert, "that a degree of it must be observed even by thieves, in order to ensure union amongst them in the distribution of their spoils."

With how much better reason may his remark be applied to a well-regulated society, where there are so many distinct and individual rights to be respected !

2. It is incumbent, therefore, on the judge, the magistrate, and all who are entrusted with authority, duly and scrupulously to administer justice to every man, without partiality; not favouring one to the detriment of another. Whilst they guard the oppressed, the poor, and the needy, from injury, they will punish the oppressor, and be active in putting salutary laws into execution against all offenders; "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty."

* 1 Tim. ii. 2.

Recollecting that, in their official capacities and functions, they represent God, who is the ordainer of government, and to whom every one entrusted with any part of it stands accountable, they will feel constrained to a fearless discharge of their duty, with the utmost fidelity. The command of God is peremptory and binding on all, whose province it is to enforce the laws:—"Ye shall do no unrighteousness, saith the Lord, in judgment. Thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour^b."

"They, too, who exercise supreme dominion over men in imitation of Christ, the Prince of Peace, must be just, ruling in the fear of God; and they shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain^c."

3. The same regard to justice and uprightness in our dealings and conduct towards each other, is enjoined by God upon us all. And we cannot live in the wilful allowed neglect of this duty, without being subject to his displeasure.

Practise the most scrupulous honesty, in all your intercourse and business with others. Take no undue advantage of any man's ignorance, to overreach or circumvent him in a bargain. Neither give short weight, nor keep unjust measures. Derive no exorbitant gain from what you sell, but be contented with a fair and reasonable profit. Neither impose on the confidence of a customer, by giving him bad for good commodities. Never unjustly praise, nor studiously conceal the faults and

^b Lev. xix. 15.

^c 2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4.

defects of an article, lest the buyer should have reason to complain of being deceived in his purchase.

It might be contended, in opposition to these directions for the conducting of trade, that it is difficult, if not impossible, always to act thus honestly; because there is so much cheating and fraud in the world, that one, who made a conscience of dealing justly, would fall a prey to the artifices of the dishonest, and lose his substance.

This plausible, though false reasoning, will have no weight to deter a Christian from being a truly honest man. Though iniquity in traffic is become so universal, yet a man who fears God must not be led away, by the torrent of corrupt custom, to wound his conscience by acts of knavery and injustice. He will ever remember, that no unrighteous gains can compensate the loss of God's favour, or, indeed, eventually prove any acquisition to his property. Ill-gotten wealth has the curse of Heaven, both on it and its owner. "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness,^d!" "Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure which is abominable? Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?" "He that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool^e."

To encourage the strictest observance of justice amongst men, God, who is sole proprietor of all things, pledges his word and honour for the maintenance and prosperity of them that deal uprightly. "Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small, (the one to buy, the other to sell with): thou shalt not have in thine house divers

^d Jer. xxii. 13. ^e Micah vi. 10, 11. ^f Jer. xvii. 11.

measures, a great and a small ; but thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have ; that thy days may be lengthened, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee¹.”

It is self-evident, that, the moment our true interest is weighed in the scales of religion, “ honesty is always the best policy ;” for the breach of it, under any circumstance, is sure to make us obnoxious in the sight of a holy God.

After the positive commands and threatenings of the Lord against all unrighteousness, we can never sanction, by word or deed, the frauds so common in trade, nor do any thing unjustly ; unless we are willing to bid farewell to peace of conscience, and to that sweet communion with God which is the greatest comfort in life ; and unless we consent to exchange the pleasing hope of heaven for self-condemnation, and a certain dread of judgment to come. “ To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

4. Again ; display an equitable temper towards all mankind, by giving to every one his just due. Defraud no man, by refusing the payment of debts lawfully contracted ; but punctually settle your accounts², that your tradesmen may be able to live as well as yourselves.

That extravagance, by which so many expend large sums of money, in furniture, dress, and the luxuries of life, for which they never pay, is a species of robbery which you will abhor. Rather than gratify pride at the sacrifice of honesty, let your expenses be kept within moderate bounds, that your creditors may not become bankrupts through your prodigality.

5. As a master, or an employer of the poor, it is a

¹ Deut. xxv. 13—16.

² Rom. xiii. 7, 8.

duty incumbent on you to give your labourers and servants that which is just and equal. You ought not to prevaricate with them, nor withhold their wages when due. Lay upon them no heavier burthen than they are able to bear, nor exact any hard or unreasonable labour. In case of a slight failure or omission of duty, do not load them with abuse, nor provoke them to anger by threatening language. Whenever you observe them diligent and faithful in your service, shew your approbation of their conduct, by giving them suitable encouragement. The command of God secures the exercise of justice to servants :—"Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, lest he cry against thee to the Lord, and it be sin unto thee^b."

6. As a subject, owing a dutiful obedience to the King, you will deem it just to pay his officers the taxes imposed by law, to defray the charges of government, and for the defence of the kingdom against its enemies. The command of God sanctions this right : "Render, therefore, to all their dues ; tribute, to whom tribute ; custom, to whom custom is dueⁱ."

Christ has set us an example in this respect. He wrought a miracle to pay the tax demanded of him and his discipleⁱⁱ. Thus, by "rendering unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's^k," he clearly condemns the injustice of those who evade the payment of taxes, and leave their neighbour to bear a disproportionate part of them.

7. The practice of smuggling is illegal and injurious. "Whilst it defrauds the public treasury, it hurts the fair trader, and encourages an infamous set

^b Deut. xxiv. 15, 16.

ⁱⁱ Matt. xvii. 25—27.

ⁱ Rom. xiii. 6, 7.

^k Matt. xxii. 21.

of men to obtain their livelihood in open defiance of the law." Those who follow this disgraceful calling often live in riot and drunkenness, and, through the violence of their conduct, sometimes keep a whole neighbourhood in a state of confusion and alarm.

We cannot, knowingly, purchase contraband goods from any persons concerned in this dishonest traffic, without being sharers in their crime.

8. Restitution to those whom we have injured, by act or word, is an indispensable part of justice. Have you betrayed any one into pernicious errors in religion, or tempted him to sinful practices? Repenting of the serious injury which you have done to his soul, seize the earliest opportunity of trying to repair it, by making him sensible of the condition in which you have placed him, and by inducing him to reform his wicked life.

Have you defrauded any man of his property; or withheld from him what is justly due? Lose not a moment in making full restitution, to the utmost of your power. Let not conscience reproach you with the guilt of living dishonestly on property which belongs not to you; for, to act in this scandalous way, is to violate the golden maxim of Christ, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Have you done an injury to your neighbour, by calumny, or by propagating a falsehood to the discredit of his character? As the reputation of a good name is preferable to riches, if, through malicious resentment, or any other evil passion, you have aimed a blow at the fame or character of another, justice to the person whom you have thus dishonoured demands a full and open retraction of the falsehood. This reparation cannot be refused, without the

greatest injustice to the aggrieved party, and rendering the calumniator deservedly odious in the eyes of all men.

LECTURE XLVIII.

OF THE EXERCISE OF CHARITY, AND COMPASSION TO
THE SOULS AND BODIES OF MEN.

1 Pet. iii. 8. *Having compassion one of another, love as brethren; be pitiful, be courteous.*

No Christian will ever content himself with a negative goodness, which preserves him from wilfully injuring or deceiving his fellow-creatures. Influenced by the love of God, he will shew kindness to men in their afflictions, knowing, that whilst he is in the flesh, he is as liable to suffer as others*.

In this world of sorrow, truly benevolent minds can never want opportunities of doing good to mankind; whose spiritual and temporal necessities are so numerous, as to require every assistance which well-disposed persons are able to afford.

1. Since the soul as much surpasses the body in value, as eternity exceeds the short duration of time, it is evident that the spiritual necessities of men claim our first and greatest consideration. And if it be justly deemed an act of inhumanity to refuse bread to the hungry, and clothes to the naked, when it is in our power to relieve their wants, how much more criminal must it be, in the eye of our Maker, to withhold instruction from the souls of men, and thus suffer them to “perish eternally, for lack of knowledge!” Now, when we reflect that we are surrounded with immortal beings “who are alienated

* Rom. xii. 15.

** Hos. iv. 6.

from God, and enemies to him by wicked works," their lost condition calls aloud for compassion and the tenderest exertions of Christian pity and love. Where, then, is our brotherly affection, if we decline doing what we can to save those who are sunk in ignorance and vice from the bitter sufferings of endless death?

2. Our compassion to the souls of men must inspire us with holy zeal, to attempt, with the Divine blessing, to rescue them from destruction. We must instruct them, as well as we are able, in the truths of religion; and try to persuade them, in the most affectionate manner, to embrace the Saviour, and seek an interest in his everlasting kingdom. We should watch for suitable occasions to set before them the evil of sin, and the ruin which it will bring on them without a speedy repentance^b.

3. Nor should we be backward, to the best of our means, to furnish the poor and the ignorant with such religious helps as they need; particularly by distributing amongst them the Scriptures, and serious books; which may be instrumental in turning them "from darkness to light," and in making them heirs of a blissful immortality.

Nor let us forget to add, to our endeavours to convert men's souls, the irresistible force of a pious life; which will sooner convince them of the general importance of religion, than the strongest arguments we can advance in its behalf.

4. As it is important to preserve the rising generation from the infection of evil examples, and to form their minds on the principles of God's holy word, it is our duty, both by our pecuniary and personal assistance, to favour the establishment of

^b 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

schools for the religious and moral instruction of the children of the poor; that, instead of being brought up in ignorance, and drinking in the poison of infidelity, and disaffection to Government, they may understand their duty to God and man, and thus prove a blessing, and not a curse, to society.

So far, we have been considering the compassion which is due to the spiritual state of the community, and the neighbourhood in which we live.

5. If, however, we would practise mercy to the full extent required by the Gospel, we must not confine its operation to the comparatively little circle of our own nation or neighbourhood; but give full scope to the philanthropy of the heart, by permitting it to expand with generous affections towards every individual of the human race. Related, as we are, to every man, who is a partaker with us of the same sinful nature, and liable to the same infirmities and sorrows, we should esteem him as our brother, whatever may be his complexion and circumstances, or however he may be separated from us by rivers and seas and continents. That God expects from us the exercise of this Christian affection towards all our fellow-creatures, is evident, from that principle of benevolence which he has implanted in our hearts, and which, if not cramped by prejudice, or excessive self-love, will lead us to seek, according to our means, the happiness of all mankind^{bb}.

It is evident, then, that there are certain offices of humanity, charity, and justice, which we owe unto all men, in their collective capacity; and which we are able to perform, without injury to ourselves, or to those who have an immediate claim on our support.

6. There are countless myriads, who are borne of

^{bb} Matt. xxiii. 39.

our bone, and flesh of our flesh, whose wretched condition demands our sympathy. The whole of the Heathen world is sunk in the grossest ignorance and idolatry.

“ Out of eight or ten hundred millions of men, which are supposed to people the world, nearly three-fourths of that number are still enveloped in Pagan darkness—the abject slaves of cruelty, vice, and the most degrading superstitions. Many millions are blinded by the wretched delusions of the false prophet Mahomet. And of the rest, not above one hundred millions even profess the Christian faith in its purity, but only as it is debased with the errors of the Greek and Roman churches.”

What mind, possessed of any right ideas of its responsibility to God, can contemplate this picture of Heathen misery, without the deepest emotions of pity ; and, at the same time, without feeling an ardent wish to rescue so large a portion of our fellow-creatures from their perishing condition ? If it be inquired, What can we do to relieve their wants, and render them more happy ? the answer is easy :—

7. The means of obviating their misery is in our own hands. By an annual subscription of a guinea, or half-a-guinea, to the Bible and Church Missionary Societies, we may send forth, among the Heathen, the Heralds of Salvation, with the Word of God in their hands, and the love of God in their hearts, to invite and to persuade them to renounce their idols, and turn to the Living God ; and to believe in, and wait for, his Son Jesus Christ from heaven, who hath delivered us from the wrath to come*. In this way, we can contribute our assistance for the conversion of millions, who, at the last day, may have cause

* 1 Thess. i. 9, 10.

to rise up, and bless our labours of love in their behalf.

. Our duty to propagate Divine truth, and to encourage Missions to every part of the world, where our charity is required, is founded on the benefits which they are capable of conferring, as well as on the command of God himself^{cc}.

8. We need no other proof of the benign effects of Missions, than the civil, moral, and religious reformation produced by the Word of God, and the pious labours of Missionaries, in our own country. Instead of altars polluted with the blood of human victims, we have temples devoted to the service of the True God, whose name and perfections are honoured amongst us. Instead of the ignorance and vices which Pagan darkness generates, all the virtues and graces of the Spirit, in some degree, flourish and abound amongst us. Barbarous customs have been exploded, and have given place to the benevolent genius of Christianity; which provides hospitals for the sick, asylums for the wretched and the needy, and schools for the instruction of the poor.

Now, the general distribution of the Scriptures throughout the world, and Missions properly conducted, are means which are capable of effecting the same blessed change amongst the unenlightened Heathen. They have been already attended, in numerous instances, with the most happy success; as may be learnt from a perusal of the Annual Reports, which detail the operations of the aforementioned Societies.

9. Not only is our humanity and charitable assistance solicited in behalf of the ignorant Heathen; but justice, grounding her claims on the injunction

^{cc} Mark xvi. 15.

of God, demands it. Thus speaks the universal law of love: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye unto them; for this is the Law and the Prophets." This divine precept, which obliges us to do good to men's bodies, applies, with tenfold energy, to their spiritual wants: and to shew its bearing on this subject, let us suppose a case. If we ourselves were, by a reverse of our present condition, poor deluded Heathens, wandering in woods, without any distinct knowledge of God and our Saviour, or any guide to put us in the way to heaven; harassed with guilt, and liable to perish everlastingly—and if we had heard that some of our fellow-creatures, though at a great distance from us, were in possession of a book coming from God, which was able to enlighten and to save us—should we not wish them to commiserate our unhappy state? Should we not cry, in impassioned language, "Come over, and help us^d?" Bring us, on the wings of love, that Blessed Volume which contains the Gospel of peace, the grand charter of our salvation; in order that we may be delivered from our guilt and fears, and attain the blessed hope of everlasting life!

Now this case is exactly realized, in the spiritual condition of millions of Asiatics, Africans, and Americans, who importunately ask for our religious aid. Of course, then, we are obliged, by the rule of Gospel charity, to act precisely in the same way towards them, as we, under the same circumstances, should wish them to act towards us.

If, then, we can contentedly leave unenlightened nations to their dreadful fate, where is our compassion to our fellow-creatures? Where is our mercy and charity, if we refuse to communicate to them

^d Acts xvi. 9.

some crumbs of that bread of life, which has been sent to us from heaven, on purpose that we might distribute it amongst all mankind? Where is our philanthropy, if we suffer so large a portion of the world to continue in gross darkness? Where is our love to our dying Saviour, if we remain indifferent to the diffusion of that grace which He died on the cross to purchase? Where is our desire for the extension of the Church, if we strive not to make her doctrine known in Heathen lands? Where is our patriotism, if we have no wish to bind up our country with the prayers and benedictions of mankind? If we stop our ears against the cries of the Pagan world, how shall we escape the guilt of having suffered those to perish from whom we have withheld the means of grace and the hope of everlasting glory?

10. Whilst, however, our mercy is to shine so conspicuously in a regard to men's spiritual necessities and miseries, we must never forget that the wants of their bodies demand our generous assistance.

When the needy and distressed object solicits your charity, you will cheerfully exercise compassion towards him. You will pity the poverty of the indigent, and relieve their wants; dealing out, with a liberal hand, bread to those who are perishing with hunger, and clothing to cover the nakedness of those who have no garments to defend themselves from the severity of the weather.

The case of the disconsolate widow and the hapless orphan should touch our hearts with sympathy for their peculiar grief: and if they need our aid, it should be readily afforded.

Indeed, we should not be backward to visit the abodes of woe, pitying the sorrowful, and pouring the

balm of consolation into their wounded spirits. In the cottages of the poor, many an object will arrest our attention, that calls for the utmost stretch of charitable feeling. There we shall not unfrequently see the honest industrious poor destitute of those necessary comforts which our liberality may contribute to supply. Thus, like Job, by the distribution of our bounty, we shall become "eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, and a father to the poor, the destitute, and afflicted. The blessing of him that was ready to perish will come upon us; and we shall make the widow's heart to sing for joy."

"If we possess but little, let us do our diligence gladly to give of that little;" and maintain a charitable feeling towards the necessitous.

If we have no alms to give, and no bread to communicate to the hungry, still we can discover a merciful temper towards them, by interceding with the God of all consolation to support them under the pressure of their trouble, in due time to deliver them, and to make their affliction a sovereign medicine to heal their souls.

Finally, as Christians, we shall display a spirit of mercy and forbearance towards those who are under our power, from injuries which they have done us. Instead of wishing to pursue the offender with pains and penalties and death, we shall exercise compassion, where he confesses his offence, and asks forgiveness; unless the exercise of mercy would prove injustice and cruelty to society.

If any have contracted debts for which they are answerable to you, it is much more humane to forego the rigorous execution of the law, where not idleness and vice, but the appointment of Providence, has dis-

* Job xxix. 12—17.

abled the debtor from satisfying your just demands. Add not sorrow to those honest breasts which God has wounded. "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

^f Luke vi. 36.

LECTURE XLIX.

ON JUDGING CHARITABLY OF OTHERS.

John vii. 24.—*Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.*

A CHRISTIAN, knowing how many there are who are fond of misrepresentation, and calumny, and evil speaking, learns the expediency of shewing the utmost candour in forming a judgment of men's conduct; especially where any doubt remains with regard to the motive from which it may spring.

But when the actions of men are palpably such as not only law and reason, but the word of God, clearly condemn, it would be the greatest want of charity to their souls to flatter them with a hope of escaping the wrath of Heaven, unless they find repentance unto life. To think favourably, or to justify the wickedness, of the sworn enemies of God, such as thieves, murderers and drunkards, and self-righteous, covetous, sensual, profane, lying, revengeful, and malicious persons, would be acting the cruel part of assisting the Devil to delude their souls, till they are lost for ever*. "These are sins which go before men to judgment^b," and stamp those who commit them with the seal of condemnation.

But, setting aside instances like these, there are

* 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

^b 1 Tim. v. 24.

many actions of a doubtful aspect. Here there is scope for the display of charitable feelings and opinions. And, in cases of this kind, it is contrary to the law of Christian charity to form a rash judgment, or to condemn men, when there is no sufficient reason to justify a peremptory sentence.

1. Judge charitably of men's words, when there is any thing in them that will admit of a favourable construction. It is a proof of a captious mind, waiting for an opportunity of doing mischief, "which makes a man an offender for an unadvised word." It is probable that many expressions, that have for a time kindled our resentment against others, have been, in some instances, well intended, and, in others, totally mistaken; as an explanation of their meaning has fully proved. Our own experience, therefore, should correct our judgment, and make us dread the guilt and injustice of affixing a bad signification to words of a doubtful meaning. In our intercourse with others, let us never torture their expressions with a view to make them speak a malevolent language; but, where no circumstance positively forbids it, let us be always ready to interpret what is said as spoken with a good design.

2. With respect to the intentions of men, as they can only be fully known to God, the great searcher of hearts, we must be cautious how we impute evil; where it is not manifest. It is not for us to sit in judgment on the motives of others, which are often different from what we, in the hurry of a moment, have been led to suppose. It is not difficult to blast and tarnish the most honourable action, by ascribing it to a bad origin; or to sanction the greatest vil-

* Isa. xxix. 21.

* 1 Cor. xiii. 4—8.

lany, by covering its guilt under a plausible name or pretext^d.

Beware of "evil surmisings." Do not hastily pronounce that an act springs from a corrupt design, when you have no clear evidence to substantiate the charge. On the contrary, when there is any thing in the case to justify it, lean on the side of charity. This temper is expected from us by Christ our Saviour. "Judge not—where the law of God is silent, or where you can have no competent knowledge to guide your decision—that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again^{dd}."

A compliance with this duty will appear reasonable, when you remember how often you have acted with conscious uprightness, and yet wrong intentions have been suspected, if not charged upon you, by the uncharitableness of others. Your conduct, however righteous, has often, perhaps, been cruelly misconstrued, and impeached, and unjustly condemned. You will learn, from this, to sympathize with those who may share in the treatment which you have experienced; knowing that men may really design nothing but the glory of God, and the good of society, whilst their names, and their motives, and their conduct, may be branded with infamy.

3. In forming a judgment, or in speaking of the actions of men, exercise as much candour as is consistent with truth and facts. Many actions, which have appeared to us, at first sight, to wear a doubtful aspect, have been found, on examination, to be strictly just and good. It is not always possible to form a

^d Isa. v. 20.

^{dd} Mat. vii. 1, 2.

proper opinion of an action from its mere superficialities: it may have internal characters, which stamp an excellence upon it, that is not seen, but on a close inspection. Besides, there are circumstances of necessity, which powerfully plead for the wisdom of deeds that we may hastily condemn, for want of more accurate knowledge. Is it without reason, then, that our Lord has given us this wise admonition: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment".

Quarrels will sometimes happen amongst neighbours, divisions and feuds in family connections, and contests about rights or property amongst bodies of public men. On these occasions, the most bitter and violent accusations are common from both sides, which have little or no foundation in truth. The respective parties, as they may be wrought upon by passion or self-interest, are apt to give partial and discoloured statements of the fact; which cannot, in many instances, be known, without a rigid inquiry into all the particulars of the disputed point.

We should not, therefore, as some do, receive ill impressions from common report; but suspend our judgment, until we are able more fully to ascertain the truth or falsehood of the circulated rumours. "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is a folly and shame unto him".

4. Be charitable in the opinion which you form of the characters of men. Let not a single offence, contrary to the whole tenor of a man's life, induce you to execrate his name, or impeach his sincerity. Brand no one as an incorrigible villain, because he was once guilty of fraud and deceit towards you, and of which he may have repented with many tears:

* John. vii. 24.

† Prov. xviii. 13.

neither denounce any one as an hypocrite in religion, because he has been once detected in doing wrong. You must avoid that unjust practice of the enemies of God, who cry out, that, with the generality of professors, all pretensions to conscience is only a cloak to cover over wicked designs, and a snare to entrap the simple.

To correct this unchristian spirit, which springs from prejudice and rancour and hatred to piety, remember how often violent temptation, suited to your constitutional sin, has overcome you, or brought you to the very point of yielding.

Further, recollect that some of the most eminent men, whom God has canonized as saints, such as Job, and Noah, and Abraham, and David, and Peter, did not continue in the path of duty without a fall, or something to blemish, for a time, the general integrity of their characters. But, though overtaken with a fault, they soon recovered from their declensions, and persevered in the way of godliness unto the end.

And, if we know the weakness of our own hearts, we shall not think it impossible, for such as we are, to fall into offences contrary to our soberest reason, duty, knowledge, or inclination. In such circumstances, should we wish others to pursue us with unrelenting severity, when, on our contrition, God has freely forgiven, and restored us to favour?

In like manner, clear symptoms of repentance, in those who have scandalized their profession by some gross sin, should incline you to pass a favourable judgment upon them. Be willing to hope that secret remorse and shame for their fall has exceeded the reproach which their backslidings have brought upon them. The Christian rule, in all

such cases, should be our guide: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye, which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness: considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted^c."

^c Gal. vi. 1.

LECTURE L.

ON MEEKNESS AND FORBEARANCE.

Matt. v. 5. *Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.*

SIN has rendered this world a very disordered state. It is full of trouble, vexation, and sorrow, arising from the depravity of human nature^a. And no marvel; for where evil passions run riot, there none of the rights of God or man can be free from their insolence. There are many "unreasonable and wicked men," with whom we must in some degree be connected, whose turbulent, litigious, violent, unjust, and unmerciful tempers it is not easy to bear with patience. Hence the necessity of meekness; a divine grace, which the Christian will have frequent occasion to exercise so long as he lives on earth.

1. Maintain a meek and forbearing spirit, under every kind of ill-treatment which you may receive at the hands of others. Trifling injuries, or reproachful words, or slanderous reports, must not, as is too much the case with others, kindle in you a desire of revenge. Such things will be deemed worthy of but little notice, and draw forth your forbearance.

Should a great provocation or offence be offered, it is our duty to guard against a selfish spirit of passionate resentment; lest, being overcome by the

^a John xvi. 33.

unkind usage of others, we should vex the Holy Spirit, bring guilt upon our souls, and discredit our sacred profession in the eyes of the world. Passion is sure to aggravate the affront, which meekness will diminish or forgive. If, then, we are abused by some, or falsely accused by others, instead of retaliation, let us “not render evil for evil, or railing for railing, but, contrariwise, blessing; knowing that we are thereunto called, that we should inherit a blessing^b.”

And when you have been so deeply injured, either in your person, character, or property, that you are entitled to redress from the magistrate, you must seek it not from a spirit of revenge, but in meekness; and not until every means has been tried, without effect, to bring your enemy to an accommodation of the difference betwixt you. And, finally, should you be compelled to bring the affair into a court of justice, you will not violate the laws of charity, by breaking out into wrathful exclamations against your adversary, but act with moderation and justice.

2. Manifest a meek spirit, by carefully avoiding any just cause of offence to others. We are required by the Gospel, not only to bear the insults and provocations of worldly people, but to forbear the gratification of our own inclinations, rather than give any uneasiness, or trouble, or sorrow, to others. Christian meekness will teach us to refrain from every thing improper in our behaviour towards men^c.

Both in our language and actions, we should try to conciliate all by an obliging carriage. A civil, kind, and respectful conduct is what we should discover towards one another, in our daily intercourse. This temper sweetens the asperities of life, and renders

^b 1 Pet. iii. 9.

^c 1 Cor. x. 31—33.

its burdens more tolerable. The Scripture inculcates it:—"Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another: love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous^d."

Instead of venting our rage against even our enemies, we must comply with the Apostolic direction, "Speak evil of no man^e;" unless where our silence would amount to a connivance at his guilt, or prove injurious to the welfare of society.

Let not a blind and false zeal for the glory of God and the interests of religion excite in us a spirit of resentment against the opposers of the Gospel: let us rather try to recover them from the snare of the Devil, by persuasion, and the resistless argument of a holy and blameless life. A contempt of Infidels and Heretics, who are the most hurtful members of society, is contrary to the command of God, and is a breach of brotherly charity. "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves; if God, peradventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth^f."

3. The people of God have peculiar motives for the exercise of the most extensive forbearance. A knowledge of their own corruptions has taught them with what long-suffering God has endured the multitude of their sins and failings. A consciousness of their daily defects, arising from the continued struggle between the flesh and the Spirit, is, and will be, a sufficient cause for self-abasement as long as they live. This self-loathing and humility of soul enables a gracious man more easily to submit to those provocations which set the rest of mankind in a

^d 1 Pet. iii. 8.

^e Tit. iii. 2.

^f 2 Tim. ii. 24, 26.

flame. Under the worst treatment, he will say, Shall I, who deserve the sorest punishment for my sins against God, avenge myself on a fellow-worm, and pursue him with implacable wrath for every affront? The Apostle founds an argument for our forbearance under injuries, upon our own sinful state by nature:—"Put them in mind to be gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men: for we ourselves, also, were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another^c."

4. Again; the believer will set before his eyes the bright example of meekness which Christ displayed, under the greatest insults that malice could devise. "When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously^b." Call to mind his patience during his crucifixion; and derive from it a motive to the practice of long-suffering and compassion, even towards your most avowed foes.

5. The command of God enjoins us to put away "all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, with all malice^d;" to be "no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men^e." The words of Christ are designed to check every motion of improper passion or causeless anger. "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to him, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool! shall be in danger of hell-fire^f."

Surely, when we think of this awful declaration, it should keep us at a distance from those angry con-

^c Tit. iii. 1—3.

^b 1 Pet. ii. 23.

^c Eph. iv. 31.

^d Tit. iii. 2.

^e Mat. v. 22.

^f Mat. v. 22.

tentions which produce such deplorable mischiefs both in family and public circles.

6. Moreover, meekness is so highly pleasing to God, that he has promised to honour it before all men. He affirms, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth^m." It is spoken of as a distinguished excellence of a Christian, that he possesses "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is of great price in the sight of Godⁿ."

Who, then, that dreads the Divine indignation, will not tremble to indulge in a bitter, uncharitable, and vindictive temper, which is fraught with so much uneasiness to those who cherish it, and which is the spring of so many evils in society? And who, that values the favour of God, so essential to our happiness, will not feel ambitious to possess the grace of a meek and forgiving spirit, which is so honourable in his estimation? "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye^o."

^m Mat. v. 5.

ⁿ 1 Pet. iii. 4.

^o Col. iii. 12, 13.

LECTURE LI.

ON THE FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

Colossians iii. 13. *Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*

God bestows on his beloved people various graces, to answer every emergency of the Christian life: "and where, in this way, much is given, much is

also required," to shew that the talents which He has committed to their care have not been bestowed in vain. "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come^a." The faith, and patience, and forbearance of the man of God, therefore, will have many demands made on them, by the injustice, violence, and knavery of some, and the insults, reproaches, and vexations of others. He, then, has made the happiest proficiency in Christian knowledge and tempers, who, like his heavenly Master, can most readily forgive those who have trespassed against him; whilst those professing Christians, who can allow themselves to burn with anger and resentment on every occasion of offence from their erring fellow-sinners, have yet to learn a very important branch of their duty—the forgiveness of injuries. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." "Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good^b." "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye^c."

1. It is plain enough, from these positive directions, that we must not yield to a revengeful temper, but conduct ourselves with meekness under every provocation, however trying to corrupt nature; and that we should pass over small affronts and trifling injuries, in a spirit of love and Christian kindness, as unworthy of serious notice.

If your name and character have been wickedly aspersed, refute the malicious attempts of your

^a Mat. xviii. 7.

^b Rom. xii. 19—21.

^c Col. iii. 13.

enemy, without using any abusive language of re-
crimination.

Should your actions be vilified, or imputed to bad motives, forgive most cheerfully the uncharitable opinions entertained concerning you ; and “ commit your cause unto the Lord, and wait patiently for him ; and he shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noon-day^d.”

If grievous wrongs have been done to your person or property, such as compel you to seek legal satisfaction, discover no animosity towards the offending party ; and, when you have obtained the redress you sought, instead of giving way to a malignant feeling on account of your triumph, bear it with moderation. And should your foes be in want or distress, shew your good-will towards them, by acts of sympathy, and by affording such relief, if it is in your power, as their necessities call for.

2. Do any persecute you, because you profess and faithfully adhere to the Gospel of Christ ? Is “ your name cast out as evil for his sake ?” and do your nearest friends oppose and use you ill, because you prefer truth to error, and good to evil ? This trial, though it may severely exercise your patience, must not betray you into fits of passion and revenge ; “ for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal.” You should rather pray for grace to bear the cross patiently, until God shall either remove it out of the way, or soften the rage of your persecutors. Amidst all their cruelty and hard usage, endeavour to maintain a spirit of the most fervent love to their souls, by praying to God for their conversion ; who is able “ to give them repentance unto the acknowledgment of the truth.” And, with the Apostles of Christ,

^d Psalm xxxvii. 4—6.

^e 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

“rejoice that you are counted worthy to suffer shame for his name^f.” “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the Prophets, which were before you^g.”

It is clearly, then, our bounden duty to bear with the ill-temper, the frowardness, and perversity of our friends and neighbours; and to shew no malice; but to extend a sincere forgiveness to our most deadly enemies. The most forcible arguments may be urged to enforce a practice of it.

3. It is the will of God “that we should put away all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, with all malice; and be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven us^h.” The motives here suggested for our obedience to the Divine command are such as should constrain us “to love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for them who despitefully use and persecute us; that we may be the children of our Father which is in heaven: for He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the sameⁱ?”

4. The conduct of God towards sinners shews how culpable it is to indulge resentment against those who have injured us. How numerous are the affronts, how aggravating the insults, which Jehovah hourly and daily receives from daring transgressors!

^f Acts v. 41.

^g Mat. v. 10—13.

^h Eph. iv. 31, 32.

ⁱ Mat. v. 44—46.

They blaspheme his name, wilfully break his law, abuse his mercies, and despise his threatened judgments. And yet God continues slow to anger; and waits for a long time, to see whether they will repent of their evil ways, and become obedient to his laws. Now, if we think of the guilt and unworthiness of the persons, the obligations they are under to him, and consider the glory of His Majesty, and the ample means which he has to wreak vengeance on his haughtiest foes by destroying them in a moment, then his patience and compassion will strike us with astonishment.

See, moreover, how bright the glory and mercy of God shine in the redemption of the world! Had he been disposed to take vengeance, what would have become of sinful creatures; yea, of the universe which had risen up in arms against him! If God had thought of saving only those who loved him, or of conferring spiritual blessings on them who of their own accord sought to obtain them, then not one of Adam's degenerate sons would have even gained a seat in heaven^k.

God has not merely provided salvation for us, but is obliged to overcome our enmity, and induce us to accept of it, before we ever feel the least inclination to choose his service. "God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us^l." Can we, then, allow ourselves to be transported with anger against our fellow-creatures, when God has exercised the richest compassion towards us?

5. God's mercy to you should produce in you a disposition to forgive others. You have, it may be, lived long in forgetfulness and contempt of God: You have been led away by vain or wicked objects

^k Rom. iii. 10—21.

^l ib. v. 8.

LECTURE LII.

ON THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS TO PROMOTE THE HAPPINESS
AND SALVATION OF MANKIND.

Gal. vi. 10. *As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all men.*

WHEN a man has tasted the love of God, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, he is immediately fired with a desire to be useful to his species, by drawing their attention to that source of spiritual good from which his own happiness has been derived. A faithful Christian cannot be contented to pass away all the days of his regenerate state in sloth and unprofitableness, "hiding his Lord's talent uselessly in the earth^a;" but he will seek, on all occasions, to glorify God, by using every means in his power to render others as happy as himself.

Gratitude to the Lord, for his unspeakable mercy, will lead him to cry out, "Come and hear, ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul^b!" Christian benevolence will urge him to invite all, with whom he may converse, to join him in marching forward to the heavenly Canaan. To animate their zeal, and quicken their steps, he will say to each, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good! for the Lord God has spoken good concerning Israel^c."

Under the sway of these mighty principles, a real believer will frequently inquire, How can I be most beneficially employed in doing good to the souls of my fellow-creatures?

The Scriptures will teach the Christian, that the

^a Mat. xxv. 25.

^b Psalm lxvi. 16.

^c Numb. x. 29.

most important and effectual means of accomplishing his charitable object is,

1. To discourage sin, both in principle and practice. He will think it his duty to lay open the fountain from whence all the wickedness, of which men are guilty, flows, by declaring, in the words of Christ, "that which cometh out of a man, that defileth a man: for from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness^d."

To make men acquainted with the depravity of their nature, is the readiest way to induce them to pray for the renewal of their souls in righteousness by the Spirit of God: for, until we hold up the mirror of Divine truth, through which they may both see and read the corrupt state of their hearts, they will be too apt to flatter themselves, that they have no need of the grace of God, either to regenerate their souls, or to assist them in overcoming the sins which most easily beset them.

In the next place, we must strip off the disguises which are put upon sin, and expose it in all its native deformity and guilt.

The Christian, in mercy to a ruined world, will denounce every vice, however common or fashionable, in the age and country in which he lives. He will not allow men to cover over the baseness of an evil act by soft imposing names; but, knowing that the least as well as the greatest sin "deserves God's wrath and damnation," he will affectionately entreat men to repent, and cast off their transgressions, "that iniquity may not be their ruin^e."

In perfect consistency with the law of charity, we

^d Mark vii. 20—24.

^e Ezek. xviii. 30.

may boldly reprove those who violate the commands of God. Nor should a fear of reproach, nor a dread of consequences, make us shrink from a duty so obviously enjoined upon us for the benefit of others. "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil^f:" "thou shalt in anywise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him^g."

Yet, to convince the offender that we really intend his good, let us watch the proper season for reproof, and administer it in a spirit of kindness; otherwise, a rash and indiscreet censure of his conduct may only provoke him to more daring acts of impiety and blasphemy.

Now, were Christians more faithfully to exert themselves, in this manner, to discountenance all unrighteousness, who can tell how great a quantity of evil they might prevent or diminish in society; how much contention, and bickering, and variance, they might lessen or terminate in family connexions; and how many individual sinners they might reclaim from the errors of their ways, to walk with God, and become heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him^h? At all events, when we reflect that "the wages of sin is everlasting deathⁱ," we are bound, by the law of love^j, to shew the utmost compassion to the souls of men; saving them with fear, and pulling them as brands out of the fire of God's holy indignation^k. If we can stand as unconcerned spectators, whilst we see men insulting God, and bringing swift destruction upon themselves; or if, instead of admonishing them of the danger they incur by their hostility to him, we tacitly connive at, or openly encourage their trans-

^f Exod. xxiii. 2.

^g Lev. xix. 17.

^h James ii. 5.

ⁱ Rom. vi. 23.

^j Mat. vii. 12.

^k Jude 23, 24.

gressions ; what then becomes of our boasted philanthropy ? Where is our love to Christ ? our desire to spread the triumphs of his cross ?

At the day of judgment, it will not be a sufficient justification of such neglect of a plain duty, to allege the general failure of charitable endeavours to convert men from sin to the practice of righteousness ; or to urge, we were afraid lest our efforts should be condemned, or ascribed to wrong motives, by “ a world which lieth in wickedness¹.” It is incumbent on us to make the attempt ; and though (which is highly improbable) all our labour of mercy should be totally useless, we shall, even then, have the consolation to think that we have done what we could to promote the salvation of sinners ; and then our peace and Christian benevolence will return with “ sevenfold blessings into our own bosoms¹¹.”

2. To promote the knowledge of true religion amongst men, is a second branch of our duty to our neighbour. We must not rest satisfied with merely reproving the sins of mankind, and shewing their tendency to destroy their souls ; because charity requires us to make another effort in their behalf—namely, to lead them to an acquaintance with those religious truths, which not only afford the sublimest happiness to the mind, but actuate it to the diligent pursuit of all that is holy and excellent.

In conducting the important work of instructing the souls of others, we must be careful to avoid inculcating erroneous or doubtful principles ; and lay the foundation of a holy life in those doctrines, however humiliating, which Scripture suggests as necessary to be embraced in order to our acceptance with God^m.

¹ 1 John v. 19.

¹¹ Luke x. 5, 6.

^m 1 Cor. iii. 11.

3. Inform men what their actual condition is by nature. Tell them, that "they were estranged from God, from the womb^a;" that "they were shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin^{an};" and, consequently, that they are "by nature the children of wrath, even as all others^o." Tell them this melancholy representation is verified by observation, which proves that man is inclined to evil, and averse to good.

: By this faithful declaration of their polluted lost estate, you will open a way for the deepest humility and repentance; whilst they will be led to feel the necessity of joining in the petition of David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me^p!"

4. Acquaint them with the method by which God reconciles guilty creatures to his favour, through Jesus Christ. By the transgression of Adam, the law of God was dishonoured, and the sentence of "death passed upon all men to condemnation^q." Now, the law thus broken, Christ, by his voluntary death and obedience, has fulfilled. He is, therefore, "the end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth^r." The justice of God being thus amply satisfied by the atonement of Jesus^r, a solid ground is laid for the exercise of his mercy to all who repent and embrace the Gospel. "Be it known unto you, therefore, that through this man (Christ, the Lord) is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses^s."

: Proclaim, then, to all, the riches of Divine grace,

^a Psalm lviii. 3.

^{an} Psalm li. 5.

^o Eph. ii. 2, 3.

^p Psalm li. 10.

^q Rom. v. 12—18.

^r Rom. x. 4.

^s Isa. xlii. 21.

^t Acts xiii. 38, 39.

as exhibited in the dying love of our Saviour ; who, rather than the world should perish without remedy, gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins. Assure those souls that are wounded by a sense of their iniquities, that Christ is a Physician of great value, whose blood is a sovereign balm for healing the diseases of the mind, and for removing the heaviest burthens of guilt from the conscience ; yea, that he invites them to make trial of his power, to save, and to render them perfectly happy. “ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ! ”

Publish, with holy delight, these glad tidings of salvation, even amongst the most abandoned of the sons of men. Tell the unworthiest of the human race, and even “ those who have made a covenant with death and hell,” that there is hope, yea, “ forgiveness with the Lord, that He may be feared ”.

Before the day of grace is gone beyond recall, urge both old and young, poor and rich, by arguments addressed to their hopes and fears, and by the most affectionate exhortations, “ to seek the Lord while he may be found ; to call upon him while he is near ”. To encourage those who have long submitted to the tyranny of Satan, to break his degrading yoke from off their necks ; tell them, that many of the most desperate sinners have already been “ delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son ; ” and that the proclamation of Heaven warrants them to hope for the same favour, if they will but attend to its cheering sound. “ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have

‘ Mat. xi. 28—30. * Ps. cxxx. 4. “ Is. lv. 6. * Col. i. 13.

mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon^{xx}."

Nor must you, through fear of giving offence by a statement of the unpalatable truth, pass over the case of the more decent and amiable, without affirming, on the authority of Christ (who best knows the constitution of heaven, and the fitness requisite for possessing it,) "that except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God". Tell them, the necessity of their being thus regenerated by the Spirit of the Lord arises from their natural depravity on the one hand, and from the supreme happiness of heaven on the other; which is such as no unregenerate man could enjoy, if he were admitted into it, for want of suitable dispositions to make it desirable.

5. Declare to all, that the reception of Christ's Gospel is designed to lead us to the practice of "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." And let us always shew, by its effects on our own conduct, "that the love of Christ constraineth us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works".

Now, when others see in you, Christians, these lovely fruits of faith, they will be induced to pay a more respectful attention to your instructions, and to admire the efficacy of that divine principle which has produced them. "All they who see it shall say, This hath God done; for they shall perceive that it is His work".

^{xx} Is. lv. 7. ^y John iii. 3. ^z Tit. ii. 11, 15. ^a Ps. lxxv. 9.

In prosecuting this laudable object, of trying to bring men to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, a believer will decline no trouble, and withhold no assistance which he can afford. He will read and explain the Scriptures to those "who are ignorant and out of the way;" and, as far as his means permit, he will assist in furnishing the poor with copies of the Word of God, and such religious books as are written agreeably to its sacred dictates.

By thus endeavouring to discourage and prevent evil, and by scattering the seeds of righteousness, the Christian treads in the steps of his adorable Lord, who went about doing good to the souls and bodies of mankind.

By labouring to instruct men in the doctrines and precepts of the Christian religion, we concur in the same merciful work in which the Spirit of God is constantly engaged. And is it no honour to co-operate with the Lord of Heaven in the salvation of the lost?

And how exalted is the benevolence of such conduct! To assist in "converting a sinner from the error of his ways," is the greatest act of godlike kindness which we are capable of displaying towards him. If we succeed but in saving one soul from death, who can calculate the quantity of good which has been effected, by the blessing of the Almighty, on our instrumentality? The good thus done, as much exceeds any temporal benefit we can confer, as perfect bliss in heaven transcends the most exquisite happiness on earth^a.

When we can adequately conceive what the torments of the damned will be through never-ending ages, and can fully ascertain the exalted nature and

^a James v. 20.

degree of that happiness which is prepared for the righteous; then we shall be able to speak more correctly of the value of those pious efforts, which are made the means of delivering men from enduring the former, and of raising them to the enjoyment of the latter.

And what satisfaction can equal that which accrues from the reflection, that Jehovah has made us the honoured instruments of imparting everlasting blessedness to our fellow-sinners, whose guilt once doomed them to unceasing sorrow? If but one person shall rise up in the realms of glory, and say, Under God, your labours of love were effectual in bringing me to this happy place, would you not derive, from that declaration, a sublime pleasure, which would be an abundant recompence for your patience, and zeal, and compassion? Every thing prompts you, Christians, to embark in this charitable undertaking with holy ardour, and to persevere in it with unabating constancy. The success which, in all ages, has followed such endeavours, is sufficient to encourage the most sanguine hopes. And the promise of God, respecting the future triumphs of his Gospel, invites you to exertion:—"My word shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." And not less encouraging is that assurance; "They, who turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever."

^b Isa. lv. 10, 11.

^c Dan. xii. 2, 3.

ON RELATIVE DUTIES.

LECTURE LIII.

ON THE DUTY OF PERSONS IN A MARRIED STATE.

1 Pet. iii. 7. *Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge; giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.*

WE sustain a near relation to some of our species, which lays us under peculiar obligations to seek their welfare, both temporal and spiritual. God has mercifully appointed this close connexion, with a special design that those who are thus united may, by a mutual interchange of affection and kind offices, alleviate each other's burthens, share in one another's sorrows, and be a source of reciprocal comfort in sickness and adversity. Now these objects are more likely to be secured by such a relation, than if each one were left to the casual sympathy of others; who, for want of such bonds and natural ties, would feel at liberty to occupy themselves entirely with their own concerns. The duties of those who live in a married condition are first to be considered.

“God himself ordained the conjugal union, before the entrance of sin by the Fall, for the most wise and kind purposes. He saw that “it was not good for Adam (even in a state of innocence) to be alone;” and that there was “no help-meet for him” to be found among all the other creatures; no one suited to engage his affections, participate his enjoyments, to be his companion, or to unite with him in the worship of God. He was therefore pleased to form the woman from his side, as “bone of his bone, and flesh

* Gen. ii. 18.

of his flesh^b ;” to lay the foundation of a moderate subordination, and most rational affection. God made but one woman for Adam ; intimating that a desire of polygamy could not enter man’s heart so long as he kept his integrity. He joined Adam and Eve together, blessed them, and pronounced the union indissoluble by human authority ; for no cause of divorce could have existed in holy creatures :—and hence, He added, “ For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife ; and they shall be one flesh^c.”

But many and great changes have taken place in consequence of the Fall. Unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant, in either party, dissolves the union, as by a moral death : and where it is clearly proved, without any suspicion of collusion, a divorce ought to be easily and certainly attainable.

Those duties which are mutually binding on husbands and wives are as follow :—

1. Both parties are alike obliged, by their matrimonial vows, to be faithful to each other ; because, by their union in marriage, they are no longer their own, but the property of each other. If either of them yield to the embraces of another person, the marriage-bed is defiled ; the covenant made betwixt them is immediately broken and annulled : and a divorce ought, in justice, to follow ; because the law of God is violated, which declares his intention to punish whoremongers and adulterers^d.

Inconstancy and lewdness, in those who are married, are crimes of great enormity in the eye of a sin-avenging God. All, therefore, who would guard against His frown, must not only refrain from such cruel injustice to each other, but avoid, in their dress,

^b Gen. ii. 21—24.

^c ib. ii. 24.

^d Heb. xiii. 4.

language, or manners, every thing which, in the slightest degree, may tend to encourage loose or irregular desires.

Husbands and wives will detest every thing which has a wanton aspect ; and maintain a purity of heart and affection, that will preserve them from the sin of breaking their marriage vows ; which is sure to displease the Almighty, and prepare remorse and anguish for those who despise his ordinance.

2. Mutual love must evince the fidelity of those who are united in holy matrimony ; otherwise, its end will be defeated. This intimate union is formed for securing a constant flow of endearing kindness and attention. “ It was intended to unite the hearts of the married pair ; and to produce a pleasing and lasting friendship, from the combination of two persons, whose interests, by these means, become invariably the same. But, instead of these advantages, a want of love, in either party, perverts the state of marriage into a most grievous burthen and bondage.”

It is the obvious duty of both, therefore, to avoid strife and contention, lest they should produce indifference towards each other, which is the very bane of domestic peace and happiness. And should disputes or wrong tempers at any time lead to variance, let each, without unduly blaming the other, be ready to make all reasonable concessions, forgive every offence against themselves ; and thus strive to maintain, for the future, the utmost harmony and affection. By the exercise of these charitable dispositions, by not aggravating each other's faults, and by strictly guarding against passion, those angry contentions

would soon cease, which, when indulged, prove so injurious in destroying conjugal happiness.

It is not, then, without the most forcible reason that married people are exhorted, in Scripture, to manifest the strongest regard to each other. The following precept, although addressed to husbands, is equally applicable to wives. "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church*."

Here is a double standard, by which a husband and his wife are to regulate their affection towards each other. The first is borrowed from the care which every man takes to preserve his body from every thing that may injure or destroy it, and the desire which he feels to maintain its health and comfort. This anxiety for the welfare of the body shews, most clearly, the strength and continuance of that affection which should subsist between the married party. As the body always has our care, whether it be sick, weak, deformed, or hurt by accident, so no defects or infirmities, on either side, will justify the other party in withholding the tribute of love which the marriage contract requires. Disagreeable tempers and qualities will sometimes make it rather difficult to behave with proper tenderness; yet, here, faith and patience must restrain us from every breach of a positive command.

The second rule, by which their love for each other is to be measured, is the regard which Christ bears to his espoused Church. He has carried his love so far as to die and give himself for it. And,

* Eph. v. 28, 29.

having thus purchased it, every member of his mystical body, amidst infirmities and neglects, and even occasional affronts, experiences his tender concern, sympathy, and affection, without being forgotten or rejected. It is incumbent on married persons to shew the same tenderness and regard for each other, which the whole Church receives from its glorious Head ; and not to discover any morose feelings, but to live habitually in the endearing expressions of mutual love.

The affection of husbands and wives for each other should, to preserve it from change and caprice, be founded on Christian principles. If it be built on beauty alone, as is sometimes the case, there is no security for its continuance ; for it will often happen, that those who have been enamoured of each other's appearance, when they came together, soon abate in their regard, and hate one another as violently as they loved at first. Such idolatrous, selfish, and carnal love should be counteracted, and be succeeded by that which springs from those religious motives which will render it more permanent.

Nor will the greatest accomplishments, or the most amiable and fascinating manners, always preserve them from the danger of taking great disgust, and living unhappily together. Many, who were forcibly struck with the apparently good sense, demeanour, or agreeable qualities of their partners, by which they were delighted with each other at the beginning of their acquaintance, often live together in a state of miserable bickering for the remainder of their days. When the novelty of these charms has passed away, and misfortune has wrought a bitter change of condition, " frequently the well-bred, sensible, agreeable husband or wife, changes with their cir-

cumstances, and grows a peevish, complaining, and irksome companion."

To prevent, then, their love from sinking into disgust, or being transferred to another object, married people should pray for grace, that their regard for each other may be rational and spiritual. They must not love one another merely on account of beauty, or elegance of manners, or any external graces or accomplishments; but because their union entitles them, in obedience to the will of God, to the warmest affection. One in interest, they must be one in heart; because God expects them "to dwell together in unity and godly love."

Where conscience, and the authority of Christ, prevail, a good foundation will be laid for the exercise of reciprocal esteem and love: but, when these are wanting, the most trifling circumstance may raise a storm of contention, that will consume the enjoyments of the marriage state, and perhaps lead to a separation.

3. A desire to promote each other's spiritual welfare will be constantly maintained by all who have the least wish to glorify God, or to make their union a source of real profit to their souls. Every man, whose mind is not dead to the common feelings of nature, must feel solicitous to procure a suitable provision for his partner, that she may not be left destitute, or be forced to depend on others.

On the other hand, a wife may express the strongest attachment to her husband, and discreetly conduct his family affairs, and study to render his home and life comfortable, and yet have neither taste nor desire for the knowledge of Christ. Mutual endeavours to please each other do often exist, where, through ignorance of their duty to God, the parties live in open defiance of his sacred authority, and pro-

voke his wrath ; and yet are very well satisfied with each other's conduct in this respect. This, however, though so prevalent, is a false kind of love, which has the most ruinous tendency to hurt each other's souls : it is a sort of conspiracy against the truth and government of the King of Glory, by which they encourage one another in irreligion, and become the active instruments of each other's eternal destruction.

Husbands and wives should discover their affection to each other by a mutual concern for the good of their souls, remembering this is the best proof of well-founded love. For how can they possess a true regard for each other, to the extent which the marriage contract requires, if they do not strive to save one another from the bitter pains of misery in hell ? It is their obvious duty to examine each other's behaviour, with a view to correct any errors, or to point out any faults in temper or practice, into which either of them may have fallen, before they have taken root in the heart.

They should never sanction each other in ungodliness and hatred of vital piety ; but stimulate one another to pray ; and contend against the corruptions of their souls ; against their pride, unbelief, and worldly lusts ; by which their salvation is most endangered. They will converse together on their state as sinners, and admonish each other of the necessity of believing in Christ for redemption. They will speak of the love of God, in sending his Son into the world to instruct and save it : and they will dwell with delight on the astonishing compassion of Christ, in dying even for his bitterest enemies. They will excite each other to holy vigilance in their sacred calling as Christians, that they may

please God, and not fail to secure for themselves a portion in the bliss of his glorious kingdom.

They will take care to model their whole conduct by the word of God ; doing what he commands, avoiding whatever he forbids, and cherishing holy and pious affections in each other, by the powerful influence of a good example : and, finally, they will pray with, and for each other, that the Divine blessing may rest upon them, and render their attempts successful to advance each other's happiness.

Were husbands and wives thus to seek the salvation of their souls, who can tell what benefit they would derive from each other's kind remonstrances and solicitations ? Such endeavours would certainly honour God, by a mutual discharge of their respective duties ; and prove the spiritual nature and extent of their love ; which, when founded on the fear of God, would be sure to be equally constant, in affliction or prosperity, in sickness or health, in indigence or plenty, in youth or old age ; durable as their continuance together ; and conducive to their advancement in eternal glory after death, when the union of the pious will be cemented in bonds never to be broken.

4. Besides those which have been stated, there are several peculiar duties which devolve on married persons—some incumbent on the husband, others on the wife—a strict regard to which is necessary for the preservation of order and peace. It is the province of the husband to preside : “ for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church.” When he yields up his proper authority to his wife, he betrays the trust which God has reposed in him, and introduces disorder and confusion. He must not, however, abuse

‘ Eph. v. 23.

his right to govern, for arbitrary or cruel purposes; but use it solely for the benefit of his wife; which was the design of God in vesting him with it. So far from regarding his pre-eminence over her as a pretext for treating her rudely and harshly, he will think himself bound, by the command of God, to exercise his authority with the utmost tenderness and moderation; "giving all due honour to the wife, as the weaker vessel"; the delicacy of her constitution requiring gentleness, humanity, and affection. When the power thus lodged with the husband is exerted in this mild and Christian spirit, instead of being grievous to the wife, it is productive of peace to her, and advantage to them both.

Further;—it is manifestly the duty of the husband to employ his time and talents for the maintenance of his wife, that he may provide for her wants, and furnish her with things suitable to her station in life. He will express much pleasure in sharing with her the comforts which he possesses, and in seeing her use them with moderation.

Though he will consult her feelings, and grant all her reasonable requests, yet he must, by no means, countenance her in any sinful gratification; whether it be too great a love of worldly splendour and vanity, or extravagance in the management of his affairs.

5. It is the peculiar duty of the wife to live in subjection and obedience to her husband, as enforced by the word of God. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church. Therefore, as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands in every thing^s."

^s Pet. iii. 7.

^s Eph. v. 23—25.

The Scripture states the reasons of this appointment to be, the first formation of the man, and the too-easy compliance of Eve, with the temptation of Satan. Her ambition "of being as the gods" was the cause of her degradation. Hence Jehovah declared, respecting her and every one of her sex, "Thy desire shall be to thy husband; and he shall rule over thee^b."

The wife, therefore, cannot usurp the reins of government, or refuse to submit to the just authority of her husband, without resisting the ordinance of God, than which nothing can be more presumptuous.

But this obedience of the wife extends no further than to the lawful commands of her husband. Should any thing be enjoined upon her which clashes with her duty to God, both reason and Scripture; in this case, direct her "to obey God rather than man." But, in every instance where compliance with the request of her husband is not contrary to the will of God, she must comply without a murmur. "Let the wife see that she reverence her husbandⁱ."

Another duty which devolves on the wife, is to afford him every comfort and assistance in her power. She will shew invariable kindness to him, be attentive to his wants, cherish him tenderly in sickness, soothe him in trouble, lighten his cares, assist him in the religious education of his children; and, by a pious example, strive to make them subjects of Christ's kingdom.

She will not imitate those mothers who neglect the care of their families, in order that they may indulge a culpable fondness for dress, visiting, and pleasure; "but will look well to the ways of her

^b Gen. iii. 16.

ⁱ Eph. v. 33.

household, and will not eat the bread of idleness^k." She will avoid every kind of extravagance, and, by a prudent use of her husband's income, repay him for those assiduities to business by which his family is supported.

Finally, when both parties are real Christians, their mutual duties will be easy and pleasant. But, if either of them remain under the power of unbelief, in this trying situation, wisdom and grace must be sought from above, to enable the other to bear the cross cheerfully. A pious and circumspect behaviour, mingled with unabated kindness, will often, with the blessing of God, win over the mind disaffected to the truth. In all such cases, it is advisable to bear unkind treatment and neglect; and frequently to pray, that, being joined in matrimonial bonds, they may both become one spirit in the Lord, and thus be prepared for everlasting life.

^k Prov. xxxi. 27.

LECTURE LIV.

ON THE DUTY OF PARENTS TO THEIR CHILDREN.

Ephesians vi. 4. *Bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*

BOTH reason and religion point out parents as the proper guardians of their offspring; whose present and future welfare they ought invariably to consult. Their attention to the happiness of their children must begin with their birth, and can only cease with death itself, which dissolves the obligation.

The common light of nature teaches us that there are certain duties to be performed towards

children, which kind and conscientious parents will not neglect.

1. It is incumbent on them to cherish the most genuine affection for their children, whom they must regard as they do themselves. They will manifest their love towards them, by the most tender care to promote their health and comfort, during the helpless years of infancy, and by doing nothing which may, in the least degree, endanger their life, or injure their constitution.

2. Parents will be anxious, when they reflect that their children must be completely happy or miserable to all eternity, to preserve their morals from injury and defilement. They will not encourage in them any vice or evil temper; nor commit them to the care of such persons as are likely to hurt their infant minds by improper words or actions.

As the good or bad seed which is sown at this season will soon spring up, and produce corresponding fruits in the life, it is of great importance for parents to attend to every thing which relates to the minds of their children; as far as their situation will admit, and not leave them totally under the guidance of those who may give them a wrong and sinful bias. By an early attention to this duty, many of those wayward tempers and inclinations, which occasion so much grief and trouble afterwards, might be checked, if not subdued; and thus their children, instead of corrupting others by bad habits contracted in infancy, would prove a real blessing to their parents, and to the community of which they are members.

3. It is the duty of parents to govern and correct their children, during their tender years, by mild restraints and chastisements. Without this disci-

pline, rightly exercised, that depravity with which they are born will acquire a fatal ascendancy over them, by the time they arrive at the age of maturity. Correction, then, is necessary to subdue the self-will, and repress the rebellious spirits and headstrong passions of children; who ought, from their infancy, to be accustomed to obey and submit to the authority of their parents, which will be of the greatest advantage to them throughout the whole of their lives.

“ Let children be early taught to understand that their parents expect to be obeyed, when they give a positive command. Were this rule always enforced, much less severity, than is generally used in the bringing up of children, would be required. For, when they are capable of rightly using their reason and liberty, that authority which prudent correction has established may be frequently maintained by argument, reproof, expostulation, and commendation; whereas, too many leave their indulged children without any chastisement, till age and habit have confirmed them in stubborn self-will, and then, by an unseasonable severity, complete their ruin.”

To prevent such deplorable consequences, begin very soon to chastise the faults of your children. Suffer them not to indulge perverse humours, violent passions, or wrong inclinations, without being firmly rebuked and punished. Do not allow them to be guilty of lying, stealing, or any other vice, without that due measure of correction which the offence calls for. Tell them, plainly, the heinous nature of these faults, and that you correct them for their good. Thus Solomon admonishes parents: “ Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul

spare for his crying^a." And he cautions them not to withhold chastisement, when necessary, from a mistaken tenderness, which may prove fatal to the welfare of their children. "He that spareth his rod, hateth his son; but he that loveth him, chasteneth him befitting^b."

Yet parents should always bear in remembrance, that, if they desire their corrections to produce a salutary effect on the minds of their children, they must not punish them in anger, or from motives of caprice, or for very trivial matters; lest the correction should wear an aspect of undue severity, which would defeat its own intention. Parents must not only chastise their offspring in moderation and temper, but as seldom as possible, to avoid the mischiefs which unnecessary punishment may occasion. To this view of the subject the Apostle refers, when he says, "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged^c." Let them not be irritated by unkind treatment, harsh language, austere manners, or by enforcing compliance with orders which are capricious and unreasonable. Nor let parents be always (as is the case with many) chiding their children without cause, nor blaming them without a sufficient reason; for such rigorous conduct only tends to sour and depress their spirits, and to raise in their breasts a flame of passionate resentment, which, in time, may so alienate their affections, as to incline them even to despise and dread those whom they naturally wish to love.

Instead of such needless and cruel severity, parents are required to treat their beloved offspring with paternal tenderness, to speak kindly to them, to mix

^a Prov. xix. 18.

^b ib. xiii. 24.

^c Col. iii. 21.

with their authority over them every prudent mark of affection, "and to use every method, as they grow up, to render their children easy and happy in their company, and confident of a favourable reception in every attempt to please them. This line of conduct greatly tends to keep them out of temptation, to improve their minds, and to make the parental authority of wisdom and love respectable and amiable in their eyes. And if, by such means, they can allure their children to choose them for companions, counsellors, and friends, in all their undertakings, a most important point will be carried."

4. Parents must take care to give their children an education suited to the station in which they are likely to be placed. As soon as reason begins to dawn, such things may be taught them as they are able to comprehend. They should early be accustomed to application and observation; and their minds be stored, as they become capable of it, with information on every subject which may conduce to make them useful to themselves and to society. When they are sufficiently old to benefit by the instructions of teachers, let them enjoy such a share of this great advantage, as the circumstances of their parents will admit, or as may be necessary to qualify them to fill up with credit the particular station in life to which Providence calls them.

The benefits of education cannot be sufficiently valued; but the neglect of it, as may be learnt from the occurrences of almost every day, is productive of much evil and sorrow. If the minds of youth remain uninstructed, and they are allowed to enter upon a wicked world without a knowledge of God, of themselves, and of their duty to others, what can we look for, but those sinful tempers and detestable

vices, which not only render them nuisances and pests to the community, but obnoxious to the wrath of an incensed God?

Parents, with the blessing of God, and the labours of moral and religious instructors, might often save their children from disgrace, and an ignominious death; and themselves from the heart-rending thought, that the neglect of a right discipline and education has greatly contributed to the commission of those offences against God and man, which have ensured their present, if not their future ruin^d.

5. It is the bounden duty of parents to endeavour to make a suitable provision for their children, that they may be enabled to live comfortably in society, without being a burthen to others for support. "The Christian is not, indeed, allowed to seek great things for his family, or to be desirous of advancing them much above his own rank in life: yet he will judge it best, if the Lord will, that they should not be depressed much below it, at least by his fault; for that condition in which men have been brought up, is generally safest for them."

6. Parents, besides preserving their children from idleness, self-indulgence, extravagance, and bad connexions, will early accustom them to habits of industry and activity, and such pursuits as are of a profitable tendency. The Jews always bring up their children to some suitable trade or profession, that, in case of misfortune, they may be able to acquire a subsistence, without being troublesome to the community to which they belong. Their example, in this respect, might be generally followed with the greatest advantage. Parents should not suffer their children to lead an indolent life, lest they should become inju-

^d Prov. xxii. 6.

nous to themselves and to others; but after making the best provision which they can for them, should enable them, by honest industry, or some liberal profession, to support themselves, and become useful members of society. Thus they might preserve their offspring from poverty, and from their being obliged to settle in a condition of life much beneath that in which they were born; a cause frequently of much vexation to them through the remainder of their lives.

Much patience will be requisite, and many trials must be encountered, in strictly adhering to this mode of disciplining children; and the success may not, in every instance, answer expectation: still, a great deal more good may be effected by it, in regulating the affections and minds of young persons, in preserving their principles from contagion, and in qualifying them for usefully filling up the stations for which they are designed, than parents are apt to suppose. The benefits, therefore, both temporal and eternal, generally flowing from such a course of education, are so great, that they ought to stimulate those who have the welfare of their offspring at heart, to put it in practice, in order that they may do what they can to make them a blessing in the age in which they live, and to render them subjects of Christ's everlasting kingdom.

LECTURE LV.

ON THE DUTY OF PARENTS TO PROMOTE THE SPIRITUAL
WELFARE OF THEIR CHILDREN.

Eph. vi. 4. Bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

THE connexion between Children and Parents is so near, that mere natural affection should prompt the

latter to spare no pains to provide, in the best manner which they are able, for the eternal happiness of the former. When they reflect, too, that their children are candidates for the unseen glories of eternity, which they must secure by a life of faith and righteousness, or be driven from the presence of God into outer darkness, surely those parents who have any fear of God, or real love for their children, will not neglect any means in their power of promoting the salvation of their precious souls.

1. Parents are required by God to pay the strictest attention to this duty. "These words, saith the Lord, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children; and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up^a." In the most earnest manner does Solomon admonish parents to bring up their offspring in the fear and knowledge of God, from a consideration of the benefits which accrue therefrom in time and eternity: "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it^b." To "bring up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord^c," is a most effectual step for preserving and perpetuating the knowledge of God and religion amongst men, from one generation to another, even to the end of time.

2. To the faithful discharge of this sacred obligation Christian parents strongly bind themselves, by entering their children into covenant with God almost as soon as they are born. In the ordinances of baptism, by which their children are devoted to the service and honour of Christ the Saviour, al-

^a Mt. vi. 7—10.

^b Prov. xiii. 6.

^c Eph. vi. 4.

though they do not answer in person for them, yet they choose friends who solemnly engage to join with them in seeing their children "virtuously brought up to lead a godly and a Christian life." Now, by a neglect of duty, in this important particular, this solemn ordinance of Christ is turned into a useless and unmeaning ceremony.

3. This duty is more incumbent on parents, because they are entrusted by God with the office of forming the minds of their children on religious principles; which they should be solicitous to do in youth, when they are most capable of receiving and retaining good impressions. If this best opportunity for instructing them in the truths of God's holy word be lost, every future means of grace may fail of the wished-for effect; and then, can we feel any surprise if they should live in ignorance of God, and of "the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory;" and, at last, "perish for lack of knowledge?" And, indeed, it is unreasonable to expect that children will attach any value to religion, when parents are so criminally negligent, as never to mention it, or to press its duties upon them.

We may learn, in two instances which Scripture furnishes, in what a different light God regards those who attend to, and those who neglect, the proper education of their children; as they clearly shew, that He particularly observes the conduct of parents in this respect.

Notice the high commendation which He gave to the "Father of the faithful." "The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do? for I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep

the way of the Lord *.” God honoured him in the most singular manner, by giving him a promise of Christ, and expressing his approbation of his conduct, in religiously educating his children, and bringing them up in the fear of his holy name.

Mark, on the contrary, the anger of God against those parents who shamefully allow their children to act as they please. The case of Eli, and the fate of his two sons, should be a constant warning to all who have the charge of instructing youth. Eli possessed a knowledge of the ways of God; but, “because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not,” he drew on himself, and on them also, the just indignation of the Lord. By allowing them to persist in evil practices, instead of suitably chastising them, he became an accessary in their crime, and thus brought perpetual disgrace on his family †.

How truly was the declaration fulfilled in the experience of Abraham and Eli, “Them that honour me, saith the Lord, I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed ‡”!

Finally; the depraved state in which children are born lays a strong obligation on parents to promote their salvation. “They are born in sin, and shapen in iniquity.” It is not, then, to be wondered at, if we discover in them, from their infancy, the effects of this spiritual disease; such as, passion, frowardness, pride, selfishness. The seeds of vice, sown in their hearts, will soon grow, ripen, and bring forth; abundantly, every pernicious fruit, unless due pains are taken, in dependence on the Divine blessing, to prevent it in childhood.

How, then, can those parents be said to love the

* Gen. xviii. 17—20. † 1 Sam. iii. 11—16. ‡ ib. ii. 30.

souls of their children, who do not bring them in the arms of faith and prayer to Christ, that he may bless and save them? You are shocked at the barbarity of those who desert their offspring, and cast them on the precarious charity of others for support. But do you, parents, act a more humane part, who suffer your sons and daughters to pass through a world full of sin, temptation, and danger, without supplicating for them, and advising them to seek the light and assistance of God's Holy Spirit, to lead them to the knowledge and practice of their duty? If you permit your children to enter on different stations in life without an acquaintance with the truths of religion, you will leave them to perish in a wilderness, from whose destruction none can escape, but through the grace of God.

And let parents, who thus cruelly bring up their children in ignorance of all which it concerns them to know, think of the insufferable anguish they will feel at the day of judgment, when their offspring will cry aloud for vengeance on their heads; ascribing to their infidelity and cruel negligence the eternal misery which they will be doomed to suffer.

These affecting considerations should excite parents early to instil into the minds of their children the doctrines of the Christian religion, and to "lead them in the paths of righteousness;" that thus they may be fitted to join the blest society of saints above, and share with them the happiness and glory of the eternal world.

LECTURE LVI.

ON THE DUTY OF PARENTS TO INSTRUCT THEIR CHILDREN
IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF RELIGIOUS TRUTHS.

Ephesians vi. 4.—*Bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*

THE preceding Lectures will have taught parents the duty, necessity, and utility, of teaching children the knowledge of God. We shall now mention those particular truths and doctrines of religion, which it is proper to impress on their tender minds during infancy and childhood.

1. As soon, then, as reason begins to dawn, it is expedient for parents to instruct their children in that fundamental point of religion, the existence of a God. Tell them, in the plainest terms, that there is a great and glorious Being who lives in heaven above, whom they and all others should love, and fear to offend. Declare to them, that it was He who made them and all mankind; the sun, and moon, and stars; the heaven above, and the earth beneath, the sea, and all things which they severally contain; all of which are supported and preserved by his providential care. Inform them, that it is God who appoints the various changes in the seasons, for the manifestation of his own glory, and for the general benefit of mankind; that he orders the sun to shine, and the moon and stars to give their light; that he causes day and night, summer and winter, spring and autumn, to return at stated periods; and that he “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,” and manages the affairs of this world “as seemeth best to his godly wisdom.”

2. Then assure your children that God is unalterably good and gracious; that he is loving unto every man, and that his tender mercy is over all his works; that the eyes of all wait upon him, and he giveth them their meat in due season; yea, that he openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness*.

Next, speak of God's kindness in giving them food and raiment, "and all good things richly to enjoy." To impress this conviction on their minds, let them see, in Spring, the whole face of nature clothed with beauty, and covered with the bounty of God to all his creatures. Tell them it is He who sendeth the refreshing shower; and warms the ground with his sun, that it may produce grass for the cattle, and bread for the service of men. Assure them the beneficence of God is so extensive, that unnumbered millions in heaven, earth, and in the watery ocean, are sustained by his power.

In Summer and Autumn, "when the fields are filled with sheaves of corn, and trees bend under their load of fruit, fix their attention upon God, the invisible, yet sole author of all the plenty around them."

In the Winter, shew them how the elements proclaim their Maker's glory; how the frost hardens the earth as iron, and congeals rivers into solid ice; how his snow covers the earth, and shuts up men in their habitations; and, in an instant, by his word, he dissolves them, when they have answered the valuable purposes for which they were sent**.

Point out to your children the matchless power of God, as exhibited in loud peals of thunder, and in the fiery arrows of lightning which pass before their

* Psalm cxlv. 9—17.

** ib. cxlvii. 16—19.

eyes. Let them listen to the fury of the tremendous storm, and see some of the ravages which it produces. And then let them know, that "fire and hail, snow and vapours, and the stormy wind," however violent in their operation and effects, fulfil the pleasure of God, by whose sovereign decree they move and act^b.

By thus shewing children the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Lord in the works of his hand, and the great changes and events which he constantly brings to pass, you lead them to adore their Creator, and impress on their minds a sense of his presence and agency pervading every place throughout the universe.

3. The next truth which children can understand, is, that health, strength, sleep, and preservation, are the gifts of God. Tell them that many of their fellow-creatures are visited with sickness, pain, and sorrow, and are destitute of those blessings which they enjoy. This will teach them the necessity of gratitude to the bountiful Giver of all good things, and excite them to trust in Him for a supply of every needful benefit. They must be taught to ascribe their safety from the dangers which hourly surround them, to the watchful care and kindness of God, who keepeth them from evil.

Further; it will be of much use to inform them that life and death are the appointment of God; that we cannot live a moment longer than he assigns us; and that death will come at a fixed hour, to convey us to our eternal home. Tell them that death is a passage from this world into one which is unchangeable, where men are to live for ever in happiness, or misery inconceivable; that the wicked and disobedient will then be cast into hell; but the

^b Psalm cxlviii. 6—9.

good and righteous shall be received into heaven, to inherit joy and honour evermore^{bb}.

Should you or your children be brought by disease to the borders of the grave, let them be told that it was by the power of God they were recovered; and that you have been restored, through his tender mercy, to continue the guide of their youth, their affectionate counsellor, and best earthly friend. This representation will incline them to love the Lord, who has done such great things for them.

4. Now they will be able to form some notion of the moral character of God: and therefore they should be frequently reminded, that he is holy and just; that he hates every kind of iniquity, whether it shew itself in thought, word, or deed; and loves righteousness, as the perfection of his rational creatures.

Tell them, that God understands the secret of their hearts, and knows every thing they say and do; and, therefore, that it is in vain to hope to conceal what they do amiss from His all-seeing eye, which "beholdeth the good and the evil^c." Assure them, moreover, that God will punish them, if they live wickedly, and die without repentance; but that he will bless those who obey him in this life with signal tokens of his favour, and make them happy after death, through all eternity.

By a fear of God's displeasure on the one hand, and a wish to secure his blessing on the other, dissuade and restrain them from evil, and excite them to the practice of what is good and commendable.

5. "Correct your children, from their infancy, for stubbornness and quarrelling, for lying and stealing in the least degree, for using bad words, and for

^{bb} Mat. xxv. 34—42. ^c Jer. xxiii. 23, 24. Heb. iv. 13.

every mark of a cruel disposition." Tell them that these things are hateful to God, who will punish, with endless pains and torments, those wicked persons who do the things and indulge the evil tempers which he forbids.

By the prospect of obtaining the rewards of heaven, stir them up to the pursuit of true piety and virtue. Acquaint them that God will ever love and bless those who fear to displease him, and honour his holy name. And always encourage any good act which they may perform, by a suitable acknowledgment of the pleasure you receive from it.

6. Moreover, inform them that the Bible is the Word of God; which, as soon as they are able, it is their duty to read, in order that they may commit its leading truths and precepts to memory, for the fixing of their religious belief, and for the regulation of their hearts and conduct. Thus will they imitate the bright example and share in the bliss of Timothy, who is commended by St. Paul, because "from a child he had known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Not only teach them to pray every morning and evening, but take care that this important duty be on no account omitted, as both you and they desire to secure the favour and blessing of the Almighty.

When they are old enough to behave with propriety, conduct them to Church on the Sabbath-day, and preserve them from profaning it by any disorderly behaviour.

7. Were parents thus conscientiously to instruct their children, they would, in general, be much restrained from outward vices and irregularities; be

tolerably well informed respecting their duty to God, to themselves, and mankind; and grow up, with the Divine blessing, "as trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, by whom he would be glorified^d." And how can parents more decidedly shew their desire to promote the best interests of their children, both in this life and that which is to come, than by endeavouring to bring them up in the fear of God, who will render his faithful servants supremely happy for evermore*?

^d Isa. lxi. 3.

* 1 Sam. ii. 30.

LECTURE LVII.

ON THE DUTY OF PARENTS TO INSTRUCT THEIR CHILDREN IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF RELIGIOUS TRUTHS.

Eph. vi. 4. Bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

THE plan of religious instruction, recommended in the last Lecture, should be diligently used until children have attained the age of twelve or fourteen years. When arrived at this period, they are generally more or less capable of understanding the doctrinal truths of the Christian religion, and of perceiving the force of those arguments upon which our obedience to it is required. Now, therefore, parents will incur the displeasure of Heaven, if they do not inculcate on children the strong obligation which they lie under to fear and love God, and to delight in his word and service.

But, as they cannot rightly dedicate themselves to the glory of their Maker without a knowledge of the leading articles of our most holy faith, it is high time, at this advanced state, to teach them the following Scriptural truths.

1. Explain to them, as clearly as you are able, the origin of sin and evil. Acquaint them that God made Adam and Eve, our first parents, upright, and free from every wrong disposition ; and that, had they continued to walk righteously before him, he would have recompensed their piety with a life of eternal happiness, to which, at a proper season, they would have been exalted : but that, forgetful of God, they listened to the temptations of the Devil, who assumed the form of a serpent, and plucked and tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree ; and thus, by disobeying a positive command of God, they were exposed to his curse, and became the servants of Satan, under whose dominion they were brought. Inform them, that in this way they lost the image of God, in which they were created ; and became sinful, the slaves of every vice and unholy temper.

Tell them, that, in consequence of Adam's transgression, he was driven out of Eden, and forfeited the bliss of heaven, and became the subject of misery, want, and disease ; that the ground was cursed for his sake ; and that he and his posterity were doomed to labour and toil, yea, " to eat their bread in the sweat of their faces, until they return to the dust from whence they were taken ^a." Tell them, that this was the origin of sin and death, and those complicated evils and sorrows under which the whole human race groan. " Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned ^b."

Then speak to them about the heinous nature of sin, which has been productive of so many bitter effects. Tell them never to think lightly of iniquity,

^a Gen. iii. 1—20.

^b Rom. v. 12.

which brought a flood of waters on the whole world in the days of Noah, when all, except eight persons, perished for their wickedness^c.

Inform them, on the authority of Scripture, that unrepenting sinners are not only objects of God's anger in this life, but that in the next "they will go away into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels."

2. Make your children fully sensible of the depravity of their nature. Tell them, that Adam is the common stock from whom they and all mankind are sprung; and that he, by communicating a corrupt nature to his sons, has propagated that depravity which is visible in all his descendants to this day. Assure them, that in this manner they themselves became defiled from the womb, were born in sin^d, "and are by nature the children of wrath, even as all others^e." Shew them the proof of this spiritual disease in themselves, by that alienation of heart from God, and enmity against His law, which they, and every unrenewed person, feel; and by those wicked thoughts, passions, and desires, which often spring up in their bosoms, and lead them to acts of rebellion against God and his righteous government^f. Tell them, it could not be thus with them and with others, unless "the imagination of man's heart was evil from his youth^g."

You will, then, take this opportunity of exposing the folly, weakness, and guilt, of transgression in general, and of the vices to which they are addicted in particular. Decidedly, though tenderly, rebuke all sin and impiety in them, whether it be fretfulness, discontent, passion, pride, envy, malice,

^c Gen. vii. 1—24.

^d Psalm li. 5.

^e Eph. ii. 1—4.

^f Gen. viii. 21.

^g Rom. viii. 7, 8.

cruelty, revenge, lewdness, swearing, lying, stealing, slander, or profanation of sacred things.

3. Inculcate the absolute necessity of the new birth, which is essential to the salvation of sinners, and which consists in a conversion from the love and practice of iniquity to the pursuit of holiness; or, as the Catechism expresses it, in “a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness;” for, “being by nature born in sin, we are hereby made the children of grace^c.” Regeneration, then, is a total change of heart and life, turning men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto the Living God, that they may henceforth walk agreeably to His will.

Tell them, that Christ declares this change to be expedient for all who are desirous of enjoying the blessings of his kingdom of grace below, or of glory above^{ss}. Assure them, that “a clean heart, and a right spirit, is the peculiar work of God himself, who is ready to bestow the grace which alone can regenerate men, on every one who diligently seeks it^h. Let them be directed to pray constantly to God for the renewal of their souls, that they may “be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the Children of God^{hh}.”

4. Parents, impress on your offspring the duty of a religious life. Let them know that God charges all men to walk in the path of his commandments. As early as possible, therefore, point out to them the nature and the requirements of the Gospel, which enjoins us “to crucify the corrupt lusts and affections of the flesh; and to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lordⁱ;” to take up the cross, to deny ourselves, and follow Christ in righteousness of lifeⁱⁱ;

^c 2 Cor. v. 17.
^{hh} Rom. viii. 21.

^{ss} John iii. 3.
ⁱ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^h Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27, 37.
ⁱⁱ Mark viii. 34.

by cultivating every holy disposition and grace; such as, "faith, hope, love, spirituality, devotion, purity, meekness, temperance, gentleness, and long-suffering^k."

Let them be reminded, that, by thus acting, they fulfil the conditions of their baptismal covenant, which binds them "to renounce the Devil and all his works; the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same; and the carnal desires of the flesh, so as not to follow nor be led by them; to confess the faith of Christ crucified; and manfully to fight, under his banner, against sin, the world, and the Devil; and to continue Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto their lives' end."

Enforce a pious life by every motive adapted to work on their fears and excite their hopes. Tell them, the ungodly, who act contrary to the precepts of the Gospel, are an abomination to the Lord, who will visit their offences, if they die in impenitence, with the rod of his everlasting anger. On the other hand, declare that "the Lord loveth the righteous, and hath chosen them for a perpetual inheritance^l."

Speak, moreover, of "the beauty of holiness;" as constituting the brightest ornament of the soul, and as shedding a real lustre around the character. Contrast it with the deformity and disgrace of a vicious conduct, which entails ruin on the transgressor.

Mention the tendency of religion to promote their own good, as well as the benefit of society. Tell them, that, by a devout life, they may be the means of stimulating others to follow their pious career, and thus to share with themselves the joys of the invisible world.

But, in order to deter them from a careless or a

^k Gal. v. 22, 23.

^l Psalm iv. 8. Deut. xxxii. 9.

profligate life, frequently admonish them, that, by a wicked example in them, many will be emboldened to commit sins which may "destroy both their bodies and souls in hell."

Finally, as an incentive to obey and serve God, expatiate to your children on the happiness attendant on a pious life; which brings with it the sweetest peace, consolation, and enjoyment, even here; and a crown of glory and endless rejoicing in the world to come¹.

5. To convince them of their native weakness, and to repress in them that spirit of self-righteous confidence so common to fallen man, it will be needful to inform your children, that, after their best endeavours to lead a spiritual life, the gracious assistance of the Holy Ghost is absolutely requisite to enable them to live righteously as God commands². Teach them to pray unto him for renewed supplies of grace, that they may be strengthened to accomplish those things which God requires them to do; and they will be freely granted, in answer to the petitions of the sincere supplicant. Thus saith the Lord, to all who implore his aid "to make their calling and election sure:" "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"³.

6. A conviction of their sinful condition, frailty, proneness to fall, and of the defects of their best services, will suggest to you the propriety of teaching them to cultivate the deepest humility before God. When they recollect how many times they have already departed from the obvious path of duty, they will see how little ground they have for being proud of their religious performances, which have

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 8. ² Jer. x. 23. Job. xvi. 13—16. ³ Matt. vii. 7.

been sullied by so many imperfections. When, therefore, they have done all those things, to the best of their ability, which are commanded them, teach them to say, "We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do^a."

These lowly views of their works and religious duties, so strongly commended in Scripture, will prepare them to renounce all dependence on themselves for acceptance with God, and to place an unshaken reliance on the atoning sacrifice of Christ for justification in the sight of God. They should be instructed, from the Bible, to understand, that, ever since the covenant of works was broken, all who gain admission into heaven must owe their happiness to the merits of Christ's obedience. True believers always unite in the song of glorified spirits; and say with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb, that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing; for he was slain, and has redeemed us to God, by his blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation^{aa}!"

7. Having taught them the doctrines and duties of Christianity, early accustom your children to attend the public instructions of faithful Ministers, whose preaching, in full consistency with the tenor of the Gospel, may serve to deepen in their minds right impressions of the value of a personal interest in Christ, and the privileges enjoyed by his true followers. Tell them, God has promised to make his ordinances a means of increasing the knowledge and holiness of his servants; and that, if they join in the pious services of the sanctuary in faith and penitence, they will obtain help from God to go on their way to

^a Luke xvii. 10.

^{aa} Rev. v. 9—12.

heaven with rejoicing. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as eagles ; they shall run, and not be weary ; and they shall walk, and not faint."

By this time they will be capable of joining in the devotions of the family ; such as reading the Scriptures and prayers, morning and evening. Now let parents take suitable opportunities of discoursing seriously with them about the leading truths of the Bible, and the sermons which they have heard ; and inquire what they have learned from the instructions which they have received both in public and private.

It will be of eminent advantage to encourage them to propose questions on religious subjects, by readily answering them with as much plainness as possible. When they go to the house of God, or engage in the solemn business of devotion, teach them to do it with the utmost seriousness of mind ; because they are in the immediate presence of the Divine Being, who hates "the sacrifice of fools."

8. To enforce the pious instructions given to their children, parents must be highly exemplary in their own conduct and conversation. As they are almost instinctively led to imitate the virtues or the vices of their parents, they can never be too much concerned to manifest, by a pious walk themselves, the high sense which they entertain of that religion which they recommend to their beloved offspring. A careless, vain, and worldly behaviour, in parents, will be sure to defeat the best scheme of religious education ; "because children must necessarily believe that to be the way of happiness in which they see them walk, since they do so from choice."

^o Isa. xl. 31.

^p Eccles. v. 1, 2.

Parents, then, will studiously avoid every thing, in their discourse and actions, that may tend to weaken those good impressions which they are bound to cherish. "For, as it will appear cruel in parents to correct and reprove for tempers and practices which their children learn from themselves; so it will be equally absurd to expect that the best precepts or reproofs should profit them, when the persons from whom they come do not live under their influence." Next to setting a good example, let parents prevent children from forming acquaintances who, by a loose example, may vitiate their minds, and seduce them from the way of righteousness. Many young people may date the commencement of their aberration from God, and consequent ruin, to vicious companions. How necessary, then, is it for parents repeatedly to sound the admonitory lesson in their ears, "My Son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not" !

Keep your children from those places and scenes which may expose them to needless temptations. Their souls may be greatly endangered by those demoralizing amusements which an unthinking world too readily sanctions.

Be careful, also, to remove out of their way all books of a dubious or bad tendency, indecent pictures, or other objects which may soon corrupt their principles, pollute their imaginations, and inflame their passions. As you would put the most deadly poison out of their reach, lest it should kill them; so must you feel a holy solicitude to preserve them from reading those books, or beholding those objects, a familiarity with which may soon undermine every

right sentiment, and destroy their happiness for ever.

9. Lastly, let parents commend their endeared offspring to God in prayer: for, though religious instruction may be of eminent use for forming their minds; yet it cannot, without the assistance of the Holy Ghost, avail of itself, for the conversion of their souls to God. After every laudable effort made by their parents for this purpose, children may still be destitute of the new birth unto righteousness, which God alone can produce. They must, therefore, earnestly pray to the Almighty to succeed their attempts with His blessing, that their children "may have their names written in heaven," and unite with the multitude of its inhabitants in praising the Redeemer of their souls for ever.

LECTURE LVIII.

ON THE DUTY OF CHILDREN TOWARDS THEIR PARENTS.

Col. iii. 20. *Children, obey your parents in all things; for this is well pleasing to the Lord.*

"ALL other relations spring from that of parents and children; or partake, in a measure, of its nature: and this shadows forth our relation to the great Creator."

The duties of children towards their parents may be summed up under the following particulars.

1. They are bound to love their parents, as persons from whom they derive their birth, and to whom they are most nearly related by the ties of blood. When children call to remembrance what care, trouble, and expense have been necessary to preserve their life

during the helpless years of infancy, and the cost of maintenance and education through their inexperienced youth, they ought to feel the strongest sensations of gratitude to their parents for such acts of kindness; and try, in some measure, to requite them, by manifesting, on every occasion, a most genuine love and esteem for them, by consulting their interest, ease, credit, and comfort; and by rejoicing their hearts with studied attentions and respect.

2. The law of God imposes on children the obligation of honouring their parents: "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee*." Those young persons who regard the authority of the Lord, and are desirous of his favour and blessing, will not fail to shew a becoming reverence for their parents. They ought to respect their characters, consult them at all times, value their instructions and counsels, and conform themselves to their will, whenever it accords with reason and the Divine word.

It is a branch of this duty to treat the faults and infirmities of their parents with the utmost tenderness, and to endeavour to cover them with the mantle of filial affection, rather than to reprehend, or to emblazon and publish them. Children must bear the tempers and humours of their parents with patience and submission.

Such respect paid to parents is highly pleasing to God, whose blessing is sure not to be withheld from dutiful children.

On the contrary, disobedience to parents is that contempt of his authority which he marks with his

* Exod. xx. 12.

displeasure. A total disregard to parents, a disposition to feel indifferent about their happiness, or to behave rudely, disrespectfully, or unkindly to them, is threatened with the sorest judgments. "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it^b." Those who are wanting in dutiful esteem for their parents, or expose their indiscretions, act the disgraceful part of the wicked Ham^{bb}, and bring down a curse upon their heads.

3. Obedience to parents is required as a duty incumbent on children. Both father and mother are entitled to this attention. Thus runs the Divine command: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right^c." But how far does this duty extend? The Scripture informs us that it reaches to every command which is lawful and proper^d. Children must not cavil at, or refuse to comply with, any reasonable injunction of their parents, nor expect the reason to be assigned for it; but cheerfully obey it, though it should require self-denial, or the giving up of their own wishes.

But the command is not to be pushed beyond things lawful. Should either parent require obedience from their children in things contrary to the law of God—things which directly militate against the interests of their souls, and things plainly sinful in themselves; in all such instances, the line of conduct which they ought to pursue is evident; they must not hesitate, for a single moment, "to obey God rather than men," and abide by the consequences^e.

^b Prov. xxx. 17.

^d Col. iii. 20.

^{bb} Gen. ix. 21—26.

^e Acts v. 29. ib. x. 4, 19.

^c Eph. vi. 1.

And when the refusal to comply with an unlawful command arises from conscientious motives, God will honour those who thus obey him, and deliver them from every harm and evil.

But children must never forget, that it is not only reasonable, but well-pleasing to God, that they should unreservedly obey their parents in all things lawful, and not manifestly injurious to their spiritual welfare, however disagreeable or unpleasant it may be to comply with their will. Such behaviour honours the Lord, who has appointed parents to exercise a just authority over children, for their good both here and hereafter. Next to serving God with all their hearts, children cannot take a more certain step to secure the Divine blessing, than to submit themselves quietly to the government of their parents.

4. Should parents be unable, through misfortune, or infirmity, or incapacity, or old age, to maintain themselves, children are bound, if able, to labour for their support, and thus to repay them for that tender solicitude with which they nourished them, when they were incapable of providing food and raiment for themselves. So far from feeling it a burthen and a grievance thus to support and comfort their infirm, sick, impoverished, or aged parents, let children esteem it a privilege as well as a duty : for what child is there, who is not destitute of humanity and religion, but would rejoice to prove as helpful to his needy and distressed parents, as they were to him in his childhood and youth ? God approves of this kind of gratitude to aged parents and relations in want, by marking the neglect of it, not only as a renunciation of the Gospel, but as a crime which many Pa-

gans would abhor. "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

'1 Tim. v. 8.

LECTURE LIX.

ON THE DUTY OF SERVANTS TO THEIR MASTERS.

Col. iii. 22. *Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart; fearing God.*

SERVANTS should always remember, that it is God who has instituted the different ranks and conditions of men; and has appointed some to rule over others, for the same reason that he has assigned to the several members in the body their separate offices, ~~namely~~ for the common benefit of the whole. It is the duty of all to approve of the station which God appoints for them, as the best situation in which they can be placed; and to aim at the performance of their peculiar duties with the strictest fidelity to God and man.

1. Servants are required by God to render a cheerful obedience to every lawful command of their master. The maintenance and wages received by a servant are the price which his master pays for his time and labour. Common justice, then, requires that his orders should be obeyed with alacrity. St. Paul thus exhorts them: "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God; and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing

that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ*.”

For servants to refuse to execute the reasonable commands of their masters, or to set about them with reluctance, and in a sour, sullen, or angry spirit, is not only the direct way to dishonour God, and provoke their masters, but to render their service unacceptable, and their persons offensive.

2. They will use the utmost diligence in the performance of their duty, not only in the presence, but also in the absence of their masters. They will be attentive to the business of their station, from a desire to honour God, whose eye is upon them; as well as to avoid disgracing the religion which they profess, and losing that good name which industry and diligence ensure. Of course, to neglect any part of their work, and to waste their time in sloth and inactivity, is a breach of the contract made with their masters, by which they bound themselves to render them a true and faithful service; and it is no less contrary to the Divine law, which enjoins on all men the punctual fulfilment of every honourable engagement.

3. Servants must be faithful to the trust reposed in them, by a strict attention to every thing which may conduce to the advantage of their masters. They will conscientiously devote their time and skill in their service, watching every occasion to consult their credit, comfort, and wishes, both in health and sickness. They will be scrupulously honest in the management of the affairs with which they are entrusted, speaking the truth on all occasions. They will never embezzle or steal the property of their

* Col. iii. 22—25.

masters ; nor will they waste it ; but, on the contrary, by the exactest frugality, use it with as much carefulness as if it were their own. They will not allow any one to defraud their master in the smallest matters, by a connivance at his dishonesty, however it may be sanctioned by custom, or whatever ill-will and contempt they may incur by their conscientiousness. Thus speaks St. Paul: "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things ; not answering again, not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity ; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things^b."

4. They must consider it a duty incumbent on them to behave respectfully to their masters, whom God has set over them. They will study to give them no offence by word or deed ; but treat them with civility and respect, as superiors to whom they ought to be in due subjection. Instead of behaving with an unbecoming familiarity, or neglecting their orders, "they will count them worthy of all honour," and render them the best service in their power. Nor should servants speak freely to others concerning the faults of their masters, or assume the office of dictating to them ; for no man can be pleased with reproof from one who is bound to submission. It is important, also, for them to follow peace with their fellow-servants. Though they will not join with others in injuring or wasting their master's property ; yet they will not quarrel with them on every little occasion ; nor report and protest against trifles, but only against manifest evils.

5. It is the duty of servants patiently to bear re-

^b Tit. ii. 9, 10.

proof for their faults, owning they have done wrong, and trying in future to amend their conduct. But for them to feel deaf to just censure for misbehaviour, and to harden themselves against it, is a proof of a depraved heart, which inclines them to rebel against God and man. If, however, servants are blamed without cause, rebuked harshly, or treated ill for doing well, they should remember the Scripture maxims, which direct them not to rise up passionately in self-vindication, "by answering again^c;" but to "suffer for it, and take it patiently, because this is acceptable with God^d." When they can thus submit to ill-usage from "conscience toward God," they comply with His will, as expressed by the Apostle: "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward^e."

Instead of being angry at such treatment, servants will consider the patience of Christ, "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously^f:" and, however faithful and pious servants may be neglected by unreasonable and insolent masters, their upright and self-denying behaviour will procure for them the approbation of God, who will not fail to reward any service done with an eye to the promotion of his glory. "Whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free^g."

^c Tit. ii. 9.

^d 1 Pet. ii. 20.

^e ib. 18.

^f Eph. vi. 8.

^g 1 Pet. ii. 23.

LECTURE LX.

ON THE DUTY OF MASTERS TO THEIR SERVANTS.

Col. iv. 1. *Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in Heaven.*

CHRISTIAN principles will incline masters to esteem true piety as a valuable acquisition in a servant who suits them in other respects. And in the choice of their domestics, like David, they will seek after such as fear God and keep his commandments; knowing how much the comfort of their family, and the best interests of their children, depend on faithful, upright servants^a.

The following are the duties which devolve on those who have the care of servants:—

1. Masters are required to do justice to their servants; remembering that maxim of our Lord, “The labourer is worthy of his hire^b.” As servants exert their strength and ability to promote your benefit, they are fairly entitled to a reasonable compensation. Such is the Divine command: “Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in Heaven^c; to whom you must give an account of the manner in which you have acted towards the servants whom his providence has placed under your care.

“Give them that which is just;” that is, a reward adequate to their service; and keep not back nor defraud them of the wages which you engaged to give them. Let them never have to complain of having been deprived by you of their proper right, but act honestly towards them on all occasions.

^a Psalm ci. 4—8.

^b Luke x. 7.

^c Col. iv. 1.

Take care to provide suitable food for the support of their health, and make their situation as comfortable as you can. In case of sickness and indisposition, not only procure help for them in their work, but proper medical advice, to restore them to their former usefulness.

“A good master will not turn away a faithful servant, and send him to an infirmary, because he cannot do his accustomed work, if he have it in his power to prevent it; but he will consider, that he who has had the benefit of his skill and labour, when well, ought to submit to trouble and expense for him, when sick. Yea, if he can afford it, he will copy the example of our Lord, in respect of the aged; who does not forsake his servants in their old age, or when their strength faileth. He will consult the interests of his servants, and be a sincere friend to them in whatever may tend to their comfortable settlement in life.”

“Give them that which is equal.” Proportion their labours to their natural strength; and lay no burthen upon them which they are not able to bear, lest they should be injured by severe and oppressive work, and their spirits should be broken.

2. Behave with kindness to your servants. Masters, do not treat them with disdain, or keep them at a distance, by uncivil treatment, or by answering them with harshness, even when they are mistaken; neither express to others unfair suspicions concerning them, nor expatiate on their faults. But endeavour to win them to a sense of duty, when they do wrong, by mild reproof; and encourage them for well-doing, by trying to soften the rigour of servitude, by gentle, civil, and humane behaviour;

remembering your servants are fellow-creatures, equally as estimable in the sight of God, their Creator, as yourselves.

3. As servants are a part of his family, for which he must render an account to God, every master is bound to do all he is able to advance the welfare of their souls. He will so arrange his domestic affairs as to give them every opportunity of worshipping God on the Sabbath, and not prevent their attendance at Church, by company, or visits, or excursions. Not only will masters command their servants to keep the Lord's day holy, but use their authority, also, for enforcing the observance of it. Masters should furnish their servants with Bibles, and read the Scriptures to them, and join with them in family prayer. Nor should any excuse of business or pleasure be allowed to interrupt these daily exercises of devotion.

Besides, he will press upon all his domestics the duty of perusing the Word of God, and praying for themselves in secret ; that thus the Divine blessing may rest upon them, and that they may be training up for the spiritual enjoyments of heaven, which God will vouchsafe to all who have loved him, whether they be masters or servants.

After having instructed them in the way of righteousness, he will, in the next place, with a view to the same object, deter them from evil, by faithfully declaring the ruinous consequences that must ensue from a careless or wicked life. Hence, he will keep a strict eye on their principles and morals, and prevent their holding intercourse, as much as possible, with bad companions. And he will not suffer them to live in any sinful habit, without plainly telling

them, "that the wages of sin is everlasting death^d;" which will surely be inflicted on every impenitent soul^e.

4. And, as masters are often chiefly in fault when the manners of their servants are dissolute, they should take especial care to govern their families with Christian propriety, and suffer no disorders there.

Above all, masters! set a pious example to all under your roof. Abstain from every kind of business and recreation on the Sabbath-day, and, by your regular attendance at the House of God, and devotions and consistency of behaviour through the week, let your servants see that you act honestly from conscience towards God; and that from reverence to His law, you neither talk loosely, swear, indulge in passion, nor live in carelessness and intemperance and unrighteousness, as others do.

By this exemplary conduct, you will check the practice of sin in those about your person, excite them to repent, and turn to God; or, if they should obstinately persist in their wickedness, you will not be chargeable as accessory to it in the slightest degree.

5. Finally, let each one of us remember, that the neglect of others, who owe us obedience, service, civility, and love, to fulfil their obligations to us, will not justify us in not performing the duties imposed on us. Though a husband, father, or master, should refuse to discharge their respective duties, yet their culpable omission of duty will not exempt the wife from loving and obeying her husband, the

^d Rom. vi. 23.

^e Rom. ii. 9.

son from honouring and regarding his parent, and the servant from yielding obedience and submitting to his master. It must, however, be allowed, that an adherence to duty on the one side is more difficult when there is a breach of it on the other, and renders the performance of it much more acceptable to God^o.

Let all implore the gracious assistance of God, to strengthen them for the conscientious discharge of the duties attached to their stations, in order that they may be able to glorify their Maker, by doing the work which he has given them to perform.

^o 1 Pet. ii. 19, 20.

PART III.**LECTURE LXI.**

ON RELIGIOUS INQUIRY :—ADDRESSED TO SERIOUS INQUIRERS, WITH A VIEW TO ASSIST THEM IN OBTAINING THAT KNOWLEDGE OF DIVINE TRUTH WHICH CONDUCTS TO SALVATION.

Jeremiah l. 4, 5. Going, and weeping; they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward; saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten!

AN inquirer is a person who solicits the advice and direction of others, that he may recover what he has lost, or obtain some good of which he is not possessed, and in the attainment of which he expects an increase of happiness.

A serious inquirer after religious knowledge acts from a conviction that he stands in need of heavenly wisdom, and of spiritual blessings; the possession of which is necessary to his salvation, and which he hopes to acquire by diligent seeking.

Those peculiar doctrines and duties of the Christian religion which form the subject of inquiry have been already set forth and explained.

Here it will be proper to notice some of the most striking circumstances which distinguish the conduct of a sincere inquirer after God from the careless indifference of the great majority of men,

who are contented to live "without hope and without God in the world."

1. Sincere inquiry about celestial happiness begins with a deep conviction of our sin, its infinite demerit, and the misery to which it subjects us. When a sinner feels the sentence of eternal death in himself, he exclaims, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips*."

Such a person will naturally ask, in words that prove the earnest desire of his soul, "What must I do to be saved?" Indeed, it is only where a proper feeling of the exceeding evil of sin exists, that such questions are proposed. The generality of men, unconscious of the guilt of their transgressions, as well as the actual state of their hearts, imagine all is right, and thus go on, heedlessly, in a course of disobedience to God. They do not suspect the delusion which Satan practises on them, by lulling them into a false repose, which will terminate in endless perdition, if the grace of God does not awaken them, by a timely repentance, from their lethargic unconcern,

But the serious inquirer after God is roused from his former state of apathy. He is excited to examine himself, that he may know the worst of his condition, and find a remedy adequate to his wants. When he reviews his past behaviour towards God, he frankly confesses, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep;" I have wandered far from the path of happiness. I foolishly expected that I should have found pleasure in the indulgence of my passions; but I have been deceived; whilst I have rebelled against the Lord, and incensed his anger against me. I have wantonly trodden his law under my feet; and, in consequence thereof, I feel myself justly liable to its curse; and

* Isa. vi. 5.

* Acts xvi. 30.

* Psalm cxix. 176.

that, without some mode of atonement to appease the wrath of God which is kindled against me, I must suffer the just desert of my iniquities, and "dwell with everlasting burnings."

2. Such a persuasion of guilt on the one side, and a fearful apprehension of deserved wrath on the other, constrain the awakened sinner to inquire, "How can the vengeance of God, which is coming upon me, be averted? Is there any way of escape? Whither shall I fly for refuge? Who shall deliver me from the bitter pains of eternal death?" Thus he asks counsel, and is willing to receive the friendly advice of any one who can tell him how his grief is to be assuaged, and his soul healed, by a reconciliation with his Maker. A true penitent looks on such a counsellor with more than common regard, and receives his instructions with a willing and grateful mind. As a bewildered traveller is thankful to a friend who puts him in the way which leads to the place where he is journeying, so will a man who is conscious of having forsaken God, and lost the path of bliss, consider himself under infinite obligations to that spiritual guide, who, compassionating his ignorance and misery, assists him to retrace his steps, and return to the fold of happiness.

3. Anxiety to know the way to heaven makes the sincere inquirer ready to submit, with implicit confidence, to the instructions of his teacher. Renouncing his own wisdom, he is not ashamed to solicit the directions of those who are qualified to instruct him in the things which conduce to his everlasting peace. Like the Eunuch, he will say, "How can I know the will of God, except some man should guide me^a?" or, like Cornelius, who, although he had made some

^a Acts viii. 31.

advances in religious knowledge, sent for the Apostle Peter, to learn from his mouth those truths relating to the Gospel of Christ with which he was before but imperfectly acquainted^{dd}; the seeker after God will be truly thankful for further information: or, like Mary, solely bent on promoting the interests of his soul, he will sit at the feet of Christ, and listen to his divine instructions; which are able to make him wise unto salvation. He will duly value the advice of the most humble Christian, whose life and conduct he is henceforth resolved to imitate; and, choosing the godly man as his companion and friend, he will say with David, All my delight is in the saints that are in the earth, and in such as excel in virtue*.

4. Whilst, however, the humble seeker after God profits by the kind directions of others, he connects, with their admonitions, his own endeavours to obtain the inestimable blessing which he is pursuing. Now he will search the divine records of Scripture day and night; and constantly ponder them in his mind, in order that he may discover the method by which he may find rest to his burthened soul.

And what effect is produced by the discoveries which he makes from the Bible? At one time, he hears the terrible denunciations of the Law, which alarm and affright him. At another, he reads therein the sweet and alluring strains of Gospel mercy. The former excite his fears; the latter calm and remove them, by reviving in his soul a hope of pardon. Dissatisfied until he realizes the object of his pursuit, he "lays aside every weight, and the sin which most easily besets him, and presses toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

5. In this course of religious inquiry, he unceas-

^{dd} Acts x. 1—48.

* Psalm xvi. 3.

ingly perseveres, till, in God's appointed time, he receives the light and comfort which have been so ardently sought : then the Holy Ghost renews his soul in righteousness, and enables him to do the will of God. Pardon of his offences, however numerous or aggravating they have been, is freely and fully granted ; he is accepted and justified by faith in Christ ; he daily advances in knowledge and goodness : and thus he obtains the peace of God, and is made a partaker of every benefit, both temporal and spiritual, of Christ's redemption^f.

Now that his tears, prayers, and efforts, are crowned with the desired success, through the tender mercy of God in Christ, his state and prospects are materially changed. Before, he was an outcast, expelled from paradise, and a child of misery. Now, he is become the son of God Most High, and an heir of heaven. Already he possesses a rich foretaste of the bright "inheritance reserved in heaven for him, which is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away." Thus, his former sorrow is turned into joy, which is "unspeakable and full of glory."

Surely an end so blessed is more than a recompence for the labour and solicitude which is necessary to arrive at it. When the redeemed sinner reaches the mansions of eternal felicity, and sees the glory prepared for him, and the torments which he has escaped, he will forget the little trials of the way, and give unceasing thanks to God, "that his light afflictions, which have been but for a moment, have worked out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Oh, let every one diligently pursue the Christian calling ! because it leads its followers to blessedness the most durable and satisfying.

^f Rom. v. 1—6. ^g Eph. i. 7—20. 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

6. Reader! whilst you will not hesitate to admit the wisdom of making the pursuit of religion an object of the first importance, examine yourself, whether you do not stand condemned of negligence in this high concern. Instead of inquiring after your Maker, from whom you have deeply revolted, and seeking to regain the seat in heaven which you have lost, do you not suffer yourself to be engaged about the merest trifles of time—about objects which are lighter than vanity, from which you must soon be forever separated? Your indifference is highly culpable; for you are letting slip the precious opportunity afforded you, of gaining the unsearchable riches of Christ. Death is hastening on, and you are unprepared. Reflect on your deplorable state. Alienated from God, to whom you are an enemy by wicked works, unfit to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, what will become of you, if you die in the same ignorance, and unbelief, and enmity to God, in which you have lived? Why, you must perish forever. Oh, awake! and pray for repentance, that you may love God, and regain his favour.

7. But are you one of those who are inquiring “the way to Zion with their faces thitherward?” Do you sincerely desire to know Jesus Christ, who is the “way, the truth, and the life^a,” the way to God, and everlasting happiness? Do you say, from the bottom of your heart, “Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even unto his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments^b!” If this be the wish of your soul, then you have abundant encouragement from the Saviour to advance still further in the knowledge of God. The promises of

^a Jer. i. 4—8.

^b John xiv. 6.

^c Job xxiii. 3—6.

assistance which he has left on record, should incline you to go forward in the way in which you have set out. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself^u." His treatment of the Syrophenician woman^k evidently proves, that however long he may think fit to exercise our faith and patience, he will not send us empty away, if we earnestly implore his benediction.

Consider, then, ye who are truly seeking after God, the advantageous ground which you occupy. That conviction which you have of your sinfulness, ignorance, wants, and danger; and that desire which you feel to return to the way of righteousness; is indeed a work of the Holy Spirit, which he will carry on and complete, if you encourage his gracious influences. He has already taught you the evil of your hearts, in order to prepare you for the reception of his sanctifying grace, whereby you may acquire that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord^l." In proportion as you act conformably to the teaching of the Spirit, you will constantly improve in wisdom, truth, and goodness; your faith in Christ will be confirmed; your hopes brightened; your love increased; and your progress, in every Christian virtue, will be visible to all men.

Be diligent in the use of appointed means; such as, prayer, reading the Scriptures, and attendance on ordinances; which, through the Divine blessing, nourish in our souls the life of faith and righteousness.

Remember, that religion has its beginning, progress, and perfection. The little you know already concerning it, should excite in you an earnest desire to be better acquainted with its nature, design, and tendency. It has blessings to communicate beyond

^u John vii. 17. ^k Mat. xv. 22—29. ^l Heb. xii. 14. Hosea vi. 3.

all estimation—peace for the troubled, joy for the sorrowful, and complete happiness for the wretched soul.

If you want an antidote for the miseries of life, you will find it in the faith and consolations of the Gospel; which opens to the view of the sincere Christian, a state of rest and satisfaction in heaven, where God “shall wipe away all tears from his eyes.”

“ Rev. vii. 14—17.

LECTURE LXII.

Mark viii. 34. *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

ON THE NATURE AND REQUIREMENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

IN order to conduct an enterprise with success, it is as requisite to provide against difficulties that may defeat our plans, as to contemplate the advantages which may result from our efforts. A foresight and knowledge of the one will preserve us from rashness and false security; and a view of the other will stimulate us to persevere, under the greatest discouragements, in the hope of realizing the object we are seeking to obtain.

So, in prosecuting the Christian life, it will be prudent to expect pains, as well as pleasures; trials, as well as comforts and privileges. It is true that, simply considered, “Wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;” yet it is equally certain, that, in adhering closely to her holy dictates, “we must suffer persecution.”

Our Great Master, who fully understands the

* Prov. iii. 13—19.

* 2 Tim. iii. 12.

nature of his spiritual kingdom on earth, prepares his followers for that kind of treatment which will require the exercise of patience, when he affirms, "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world^e." Yet, upon a just comparison, it will be evident that the inconveniences attending a sincere profession of godliness in this life are as nothing, in respect of the glorious reward which awaits the devoted servants of Jehovah in that which is to come. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us^d." "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal^e."

From these statements of Christ and his Apostle, we learn, that it is expedient for those who would become Christians indeed, and obtain the blessing of their divine Master, to sit down, and count the cost, in order that they may be disposed to bear the cross patiently; and to submit, with cheerfulness, to any sacrifices which an unshaken attachment to Christ may demand. Our Lord requires this testimony of affection from his disciples, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me^f."

The very similitudes used by the holy Penmen, in describing the nature and requisitions of the Christian life, should prepare those who engage in it, to expect that they will have to encounter dangers before they can receive its everlasting recompence^g.

^e John xvi. 33.

^d Rom. viii. 18.

^e 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

^f Mark viii. 34.

^g Gal. vi. 9.

1. It is set forth as a journey, which must be prosecuted with the utmost activity, patience, and perseverance. The road to heaven lies through the wilderness of this world, which presents a thousand difficulties to the Christian traveller, which grace only can enable him to surmount. Those who walk carelessly, and unconcernedly, perish in their iniquities. "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it^a." They, however, who, in reliance upon the assistance of God, strive to walk stedfastly in the path of righteousness which he has consecrated for them, will assuredly reach the happy place which they are seeking. "He will guide them by his counsels, and afterward receive them to glory^b."

Still, it is incumbent on those pilgrims who have set out on the road to Zion, constantly to remember, that, although they have made some progress, yet much of the journey remains to be performed; "for they are not yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which the Lord their God giveth them^c." "They have need, therefore, of patience, and a continuance in well-doing, that after they have done the will of God, they might receive the promise^d."

Let not the pious soul, who is asking the way to Zion, be dispirited, as if the journey was too long, or too tedious to be performed. Though the road to celestial glory may sometimes be strewed with thorns, yet, here and there, roses are scattered, to refresh the eye, and cheer the soul of the heavenly traveller. And if he contemplate, but for an hour, the bright prospect placed before him, and the

^a Matt. vii. 13, 14.

^b Psalm lxxii. 24. 1 Tim. ii. 1—3.

^c Deut. xii. 9.

^d Heb. x. 36—39.

eternal recompence which awaits him when he arrives at his blissful home, he may well "go on his way rejoicing, even in tribulation."

Let not, then, the Christian pilgrim think of reposing on the enchanted ground of this world; but be marching forward, with firm and unwavering steps, towards heaven; in full persuasion of the fact, "that here he has no continuing city, but should seek one to come^k."

2. The Christian life is spoken of as a warfare; and every one who enters on its duties, is denominated a soldier^{kk}.

Now such a course of warfare implies, that the followers of Jesus have enemies to resist, a battle to fight, and a victory to gain, which will afford them ample reward for their zeal and valour in his service.

The character, power, malice, and subtlety of the believer's foes are thus represented: "We wrestle not against flesh and blood (only), but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places^l." This description of the number and potency and resources of our spiritual enemies, shews us the necessity of possessing a wisdom, strength, and courage; not our own; that we may be enabled to defeat their malignant attacks, and secure the crown of rejoicing provided for the faithful Christian.

Happily for us, we are not left to engage in the conflict alone. We have, in Christ, an omnipotent leader, who will animate every one of his faithful soldiers by his presence and gracious assistance, and conduct them both to a conquest and a crown.

Moreover, "the weapons of our warfare are not

^k Heb. xiii. 14.

^{kk} 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4.

^l Eph. vi. 12.

carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong-holds ; casting down imaginations, and every high thing which exalteth itself against the knowledge of God ; and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ^m."

Let not, then, the weakest Christian despair of victory, over all the enemies that are leagued against his soul ; because they that be for him are more than they who are against himⁿ.

All, however, who will ensure success in the contest with the world, the flesh, and the Devil, "must strive lawfully," and use those weapons, offensive and defensive, which the wisdom of the Lord has provided for the protection of his servants in the day of battle. "Wherefore, take unto yourselves the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day ; and having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace ; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God ; praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto, with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints^o."

Furnished with such spiritual armour, multitudes, who are now enjoying in heaven the fruits of their triumphs, and many who are still on earth, have defied and vanquished every foe. And doubtless we, however defenceless in ourselves, may succeed by the same means ; "for the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save ; nor his ear heavy, that

^a 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

ⁿ 1 John iv. 4.

^o Eph. vi. 13—19.

it cannot hear^p." He will, as he has promised, most assuredly assist, with his mighty grace, every one who is desirous "to fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life^q;" and, finally, he will bring them off more than conquerors, in every conflict. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment, thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord^r."

The rewards and honours annexed to victory, in the pious contest with sin and darkness, are of so glorious a nature, that they may well excite a desire in every heart to engage in it. Does the victor, in an earthly conflict, think himself fully recompensed for his toil and exposure of life, when he hears that his exploits have been applauded by his fellow-creatures; though, at no very distant period, his fame may be forgotten, or lie buried in the annals of time? But what bright and imperishable honours do they obtain, whose holy conduct God approves, and whose fidelity Christ compensates with a reward incalculably great! "To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down in my Father's throne^s."

3. The Christian calling is further likened to a race, in which a man can only succeed by making the most strenuous efforts.

In the Grecian games, to which such frequent allusion is made by St. Paul, the victors did not expect to be crowned, without extraordinary perseverance, agility, and skill. In running the heavenly race, we must imitate their self-denial, patience, diligence, and determination, if, indeed, we would bear off the

^p Isa. lix. 1. ^q 1 Tim. vi. 12. ^r Isa. liv. 17. ^s Rev. iii. 21.

palm of victory. When we consider how many difficulties and impediments are thrown in the way, to hinder our progress ; how many try to supplant, or to frighten us from the course ; and how manifold are the evils to be surmounted, before we can reach the goal ; we have need of Divine aid to secure "the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Suitable preparation must be made, before we enter on the course. As racers put off any outside garments that would retard their progress, so Christians are directed "to lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset them, and to run with patience the race which is set before them, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith ; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame ; and is set down at the right-hand of the throne of God'."

And when we set out, the greatest watchfulness is requisite. We must take every prudent step to frustrate the designs of our spiritual enemies, lest they should allure us by flattering promises, or deter us by threatenings, from prosecuting our heavenly journey. "Be sober, be vigilant ; because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour'."

Further ; the greatest ardour and perseverance are necessary, for prosecuting the heavenly calling with success. Racers exert every nerve to win the prize. Nor let us imagine that we can come off conquerors, unless we combine, with patience and persevering zeal, the most vigorous efforts. We are exhorted to imitate their activity, and to bring a measure of their spirit into our conduct : "So run, that ye may obtain'."

' Heb. xii. 1, 2.

' 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.

' 1 Cor. ix. 24.

And surely the Gospel suggests the most irresistible motives to exertion. The highest reward obtained by the victors in the Olympic Games was a perishable wreath of olive or parsley. But the Christian conqueror obtains "an incorruptible crown, that fadeth not away;" an imperishable laurel, which will survive the grave, and flourish throughout eternal ages.

The exploits of victors, in human conflicts, are sung by Poets, and handed down to posterity by public records: but the triumphs of the faithful disciples of Jesus are chaunted by angels, and recorded in the everlasting annals of heaven^{""}!

The foregoing exhibition of the nature of the Christian life will convince us that the requirements of Christ, from his obedient servants, are just and reasonable: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

4. The Christian must "deny himself." The soldier, who fights with a hope of gaining a victory over the enemies of his country; the traveller, who is anxious to accomplish his journey; and the racer, who strives to outrun his competitor; deem it prudent to submit to discipline, privation, and toil, as means which conduce to the ends which they respectively propose to themselves.

And shall those who engage in an heavenly calling be unwilling to exercise self-denial, to curb irregular appetites; and to forego those guilty and forbidden pleasures, which hinder them from "running the race which is set before them?" We affix but little value to the joys of heaven, if we do not deem it worth our while to make those sacrifices which the Gospel requires, to secure them.

^{""} Psalm cxii. 6.

Let us, then, be ready, at the request of our Lord and Saviour, to abandon every pernicious way, however pleasurable and profitable it may have been, and to cultivate those habits of holiness and temperance which "bring a man peace at the last." "Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul*."

5. The Christian is required to "take up his cross." If we range ourselves under the banners of Christ, we shall most assuredly have a cross to bear, a conflict to maintain with the powers of darkness, who will not suffer us to take possession of the promised land, without harassing us every step of the way thither. "It is through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom." We can hardly trace the Church of Christ, at any period of its existence, but through scenes of suffering and trial. From the time of Abel to this day, the world has treated true piety either with cold indifference, or profane contempt, or open persecution. As in the earliest ages of religion, "he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit," even so it is now**.

Christians must, therefore, take up the cross, tread in the steps of their suffering Lord, "and go forth unto him, without the camp, bearing his reproach*." When any trial, loss, contempt, or persecution arises for Christ's sake, let us neither shun nor dread it; acting as cowards, who desert their post in the hour of danger; "but let us rather fight manfully under the standard of Christ, and continue his faithful soldiers and servants unto the end of our lives."

To make us patient and submissive under the cross, whatever it may be, only let us think of the intense

* 1 Pet. ii. 11.

** Gal. iv. 29.

† Heb. xiii. 13.

agony of Christ, and how cheerfully “he bare our sins, in his own body, on the tree;” who, “when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him who judgeth righteously^a.” And, if we compare our sufferings with those of the primitive Christians, and Martyrs and Confessors, how trifling and disproportionate will they appear! “Some of them were tortured; others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings; yea, moreover, of bonds, and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy;) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens, and caves of the earth^b.”

6. Christians must follow Christ, their Lord, in the regeneration. Jesus has marked out the path in which he invites his professed servants to walk. Whithersoever he goeth, they should be willing to attend him, accounting it honourable to tread in his steps^c. If he call them to pass through the furnace of affliction, or the fire of persecution, they must not turn aside, but resolutely follow him, even unto the greatest suffering, or to death itself. In all their trials, his courageous and faithful followers may fully calculate upon the support of their Lord and Master; who is aware of the succour they need, whilst defending his righteous cause. He promises, therefore to comfort his Church under her sufferings, for his sake. “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the

^a 1 Pet. ii. 23.

^b Heb. xi. 33—40.

^c John x. 27, 28.

flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour^b."

Again; we must imitate Christ's holy example. What love to God and man, even to his most avowed foes—what devotion of soul, what self-denial, what patience, meekness, temperance, and forgiveness—in a word, what a bright constellation of heavenly virtues shone forth in the conduct of Jesus ! It is the duty of his disciples frequently to meditate on the life of Christ, and the rich assemblage of excellencies which he displayed, that they may see in him what they should endeavour to become themselves. And, although they can never expect to arrive at such a measure of perfection as Christ did, who was without spot or blemish, still, they should study to resemble him as much as possible ; because their happiness will increase or diminish, in proportion to the degree in which they are conformed to him. And, lastly, an obedience to his commands will be requisite, to constitute us followers of the lowly Jesus. It will be of no use "to call him Lord, Lord," or to make ever such loud professions of respect for his name, "if we do not the things which he commands us^c."

Let us, as devoted servants, be always ready to obey our Divine Master, even in things which oppose our self-love, pride, and vain-glory ; as well as in those particulars of our duty, where compliance is more easy. We are not to single out one command in preference to another ; but to do, in sincerity, all things, whatsoever he enjoins us^d.

7. By thus acting, we shall certainly approve ourselves to Christ, who will amply recompense the love, the zeal, and fidelity of his people. Nothing we have done, to promote his glory or to comply

^a Isa. xlii. 2, 3. Dan. iii. 19—30. ^b Luke vi. 46. ^c 1 Tim. v. 21.

with his will, shall be forgotten, or remain unrewarded, "in the day when he cometh to make up his jewels." Then he will acknowledge us as friends, in the presence of God and his holy angels; and say unto us, "Well done, good and faithful servants! enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

LECTURE LXIII.

ON THE DESIGN AND IMPORTANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

Luke xix. 10. *For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

CHRISTIANITY only requires to be better known, in order to its being more fully appreciated. If men either despise or neglect it, it is because they do not understand its excellence. "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

But whether men can discern the value of Christ's religion, or its lustre be concealed from their view, still it is intended, by its Divine Founder, as a remedy for the miseries which sin has occasioned. That it is well calculated to answer this merciful purpose, will be manifest from the slightest examination of its doctrines, precepts, provisions, consolations, and promises.

As soon as our Saviour commenced his ministry, he announced, in his public and private discourses, the great object of his mission: "I am come to seek

and to save that which is lost^b." Under this humiliating description the whole race of Adam is included. "We had all gone astray, like lost sheep," "and turned every one to his own way;" when Jesus, pitying our low estate, came to bring us back to God, and to himself, "the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls^c."

All who submit to his easy and peaceful yoke are thereby rescued from the dominion of the prince of darkness, and brought into the marvellous light of the Gospel. Hence those, in whose hearts "Christ is formed as the hope of glory," become spiritually wise, holy, and happy.

1. It is the professed object, then, of Christianity, to render us wise unto salvation. By nature we betray an entire ignorance of the spirituality of God, and of heavenly things. Men manifest the truth of this assertion, by the manner in which they treat God, violate his commands, and neglect his service; and by the wretched substitutes which they invent for genuine piety.

Some fearlessly transgress against him, just as if he were altogether unconcerned whether they do good or evil. Others act as if he would be satisfied with any kind of obedience, though it be ever so partial or defective^d.

The Gospel is designed to rectify these dangerous mistakes, by giving us a proper knowledge of God, and his salvation. It imparts to a believer a divine light, to guide his soul into the way of peace.

2. Men become holy through an acquaintance with the fundamental principles of Christ's religion. The knowledge of God has a purifying influence. "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth^d."

^b Lu. xix. 10. ^c Pet. i. 2, 25. ^d Mark vii. 6—10. ^e Jo. xvii. 24.

If we desire to have the depravity which is natural to our hearts checked, and the pollution which it occasions washed away, we must suffer Christianity to captivate us, and to govern our lives. Its beneficial tendency to restore the lost purity of our souls, is seen in its effects on true believers. In them, it leads to righteousness and peace. By the grace of Christ vouchsafed to them, they are strengthened to live to God in habits of faith and piety.

If we pant after conformity to God, let us seek it through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, who cleanses the heart from all unrighteousness, by the application of the word of truth, the Gospel of our salvation. By his operations, holy desires are awakened in the souls of believers, who are thus excited to love and serve the Lord of Heaven. In this way, the Christians, to whom St. Peter especially addressed himself, “had purified their souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love both of God and of the brethren*.”

3. The ultimate design of the Gospel is, to make us happy. We are by nature and practice miserable sinners. This is a melancholy fact, which we do not hesitate to admit in our confessions; though many are displeased with being told so by the Ministers of Christ. Yet we must become sensible of the affecting truth, if we would duly value the redemption of Christ, which is the great antidote for all the sorrows to which sin has subjected us. Jesus, by virtue of his high commission, came into the world “to bear our sins, and to take away our infirmities.” “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto

* 1 Pet. i. 22—24.

the meek ; He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort all that mourn, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified¹."

Now, when a penitent sinner comes to Christ by faith, he does experience his readiness to save him from those sins which have excited the displeasure of God against him, and to give him "joy and peace in believing"²." The happiness which the knowledge of his salvation imparts, is great beyond description. The full pardon which he receives of all his transgressions, and the foretaste which he possesses of glory to be more fully realized hereafter, afford a source of satisfaction and delight which nothing can exceed.

4. How important, then, is the Gospel of Christ ! which comes, as an angel of mercy, with healing under his wings, to remove our diseases, and restore our spiritual health. It raises us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, in order that it may make us heirs of bliss, and associate us with glorified beings, in the service of God, and the enjoyment of his heavenly kingdom.

How wretched would the world be without Christianity ! Involved in the most deplorable darkness, destitute of the knowledge of God, of Christ, and of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it would inevitably perish in its sins³.

But, now, the vilest transgressors may find the way to heaven through the light of Gospel truth. Even the outcasts may hear the inviting sound of

¹ Isa. lxi. 1—4.

² Matt. xi. 28—30.

³ Luke i. 79.

mercy and live, if they will forsake their evil doings, and serve God in sincerity and truth^{ss}.

Is it not clear, then, that the Gospel is just such a scheme of salvation as is suited to the wants and condition of mankind? How rich are its provisions! how free its benefits, extending to every contrite heart^h!

5. Would you, Reader, partake of the feast which God has provided for perishing souls? Then you must be conscious of your lost, dark, dead, and condemned state. Without this conviction for sin, you can never receive the glad tidings of salvation with joy and exultation. But whether you are sensible or not of your spiritual necessities, still it remains "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners^{hh}."

6. Christianity ought, therefore, to be universally esteemed; because the sincere belief of its doctrines, and the practice of its sacred precepts, prepare men for mansions of bliss in heaven. There is no other road to glory. Every plan which men can devise to save their souls from the guilt and dominion and punishment of sin, will certainly fail, and bring everlasting confusion on those who obstinately confide in themⁱ. Let none of us, then, fight against God, by opposing the progress of Divine truth; which "is a lamp unto our feet, and a light to our path^k."

Angels, who have no personal interest in the redemption of Christ, discover an ardent desire to pry into its sublime mysteries^l. How does their ardour reprove our coldness, who can hear of the dying love of Christ, and yet be unmoved; and of the happiness which he offers us, and yet be unwilling to stretch forth our hands to accept it!

^{ss} Isa. xxvii. 13.

^h Rev. xxii. 17.

^{hh} 1 Tim. i. 15.

ⁱ Acts iv. 12. xiii. 38—42.

^k Ps. cxix. 105.

^l 1 Pet. i. 12.

LECTURE LXIV.

ON THE SALUTARY EFFECTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

Rom. i. 16. *I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth ; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

THE gracious intentions of the Founder of the Christian Religion have not been frustrated. Although the general success of his Gospel has not been co-extensive with its efficacy, yet it has, in every age since its publication, obtained very considerable triumphs over the idolatry, superstition, ignorance, prejudice, and wickedness of the world. And, indeed, in exact proportion as its dictates are obeyed, men will become holy, pious, honest, merciful, and benevolent. These remarks will be confirmed by reviewing the effects which have actually been produced by the preaching of the cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

1. In the first and second centuries of the Christian era, a mighty influence attended the promulgation of Divine truth. The Heathen oracles were silenced. The folly of Paganism was fully exposed. Temples which had long been devoted to idol-worship were deserted ; and those barbarous and absurd superstitions, by which Satan had so long enslaved mankind, were exploded in some countries, and in others were fast sinking into neglect and disuse. Not only was the kingdom of darkness shaken to its foundations ; but the human mind was greatly enlightened by Divine truth, with a more correct knowledge of its various duties, whether civil, domestic, or religious : so that, in the course of a few hundred years after the ascension of our blessed Lord, there was

hardly a region, of the then known world, which had not heard the Gospel, and, in some degree, submitted to its powerful influence. Now, although the saving effects produced by this general diffusion of Christian knowledge might have been partial and limited, yet there can be no doubt but that the reception of the Gospel contributed in no small degree to enlighten the nations which embraced it, to soften the savage customs and manners of the people, and to give them habits of industry, and a taste for the cultivation of useful arts.

2. The signal reformation effected in our own country by the introduction of Christianity, places its efficacy in a striking light. Our forefathers were idolaters, who stained their altars with the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they offered as sacrifices, to pacify the wrath of imaginary gods, made of wood, stone, or brass. But they were prevailed on to abandon those cruel and abominable practices; and in the very temples which were once dedicated to the worship of idols, to present the peaceful oblations of praise and thanksgiving to the God of Heaven. Their religious sentiments were drawn from the Scriptures; and their whole conduct received a holy impression, corresponding with the principles which produced it. They who before were vindictive, cruel, and addicted to the reigning vices of a Pagan life, became placable, forgiving, kind, peaceable, honest, and industrious.

Nor should the temporal benefits, which this renunciation of idolatry secured to Britain, be forgotten. Instead of wandering about like savage hordes, living in woods and trees, without protection and comfort, the ancient Britons, as soon as they knew the Gospel, learned to cultivate a more settled kind of life,

became more polished in their behaviour, and gradually introduced salutary laws for preserving their particular rights.

3. To the benign influence of Christian principles it is chiefly to be ascribed, that, not only in England, but wherever the religion of Jesus has taken a deep root in the hearts and affections of men, charitable institutions have been formed for promoting the spiritual and civil benefit of those who required their aid. With this view, schools have been built for the instruction of children, hospitals have been erected for the diseased, and asylums have been provided for the infirm, the poor, and the destitute.

4. Nor is this all : the administration of justice to all classes of the community, without respect of persons ; the preservation of peace and order in society, which is composed of many persons, whose interests, and pursuits, and views, are so widely dissimilar ; must be attributed to the influence of Divine Truth, which disposes men " to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God " . Indeed, there is something in the doctrines of our holy religion which often restrains the most depraved from open acts of violence, controuls their passions, and keeps them in subjection. Were it not for the checks of conscience, sharpened by some acquaintance with sacred truth, and for that dread of future punishment with which the Scriptures threaten the wicked, life, property, and every temporal blessing, would be insecure ; and lawless men, urged on by the blind impetuosity of passion, would not scruple more frequently to perpetrate the foulest deeds.

We have, then, great cause, as a nation, to feel very grateful to God for the happy fruits which

• Micah vi. 8.

Christianity has produced in the world, and in our own country. Though its effects would be more striking were it not for the corruption common to man, still it has led to a happy change, and been attended with many blessings which ought to be thankfully acknowledged. When we glance at the ignorant and superstitious condition of our ancestors during the reign of the Druidical priests, and compare it with the present moral and religious state of Britons—though it is far from being what it should be—we cannot help exclaiming, with joyful surprise, “Behold, what hath God wrought!”

Let us constantly offer up our prayers to the Throne of Grace, that God would cause the knowledge of his Gospel to prevail more abundantly, in our favoured land, and throughout the world. Then would “the wilderness and the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose^b,” filling them with its sweet and fragrant odours. Then would the promise be fulfilled, “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatted together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea^c.”

5. Thus far we have considered the tendency and effects of Divine truth in a national point of view. Its power over individuals, who yield themselves up to its authority, is yet more strikingly apparent.

^b Isa. xxxv. 1, 2.

^c ib. xi. 6—10.

The Gospel of Jesus, when applied by the Spirit, produces a deep and extensive change; it imparts Divine knowledge to those who receive it. Sin has darkened the human soul; and rendered men awfully ignorant of the nature of religion, and of their duty to God; as is clear from the slight notions which they entertain concerning the one, and their glaring neglect of the other. But it is the province of the Divine Spirit to remove the blindness of the heart, by acquainting it with the spiritual character and worship of the Living God, "whom to know is life eternal." This wisdom is vouchsafed to every true believer. "From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus^d."

The religion of Jesus induces those who cordially embrace it, to give a decided preference to objects more substantial than those which rejoice carnal men. It "sets their affections on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right-hand of God^e." It improves the life and conversation. The powerful tendency of the Gospel to convert and sanctify the heart is visible in those persons who have been made partakers of its heavenly benefits. By its sublime influence, the soul is turned from darkness to light, and from the service of idols to the true God; yea, is purified from its defilement, and receives a strong bias to that which is good: so that "old things may be said to have passed away, and all things to have become new^f." And, thus, the passionate and wrathful learn to check the violence of evil tempers, and to conduct themselves with meekness towards others: those who have been addicted to intemperance and sensuality and lust,

^d 2 Tim. iii. 15, ^e Col. iii. 1-3, ^f 2 Cor. v. 17.

renounce their sinful pleasures, and follow after righteousness. The drunkard forsakes his cups, and becomes sober. The miser becomes liberal, and freely parts with his gold, to relieve the wants of the necessitous. The worldly are made spiritual: and every species of transgressors lay aside their besetting sins, and strive to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Surely effects like these, resulting from the Gospel of Christ, loudly bespeak its mighty power, and commend it to us, as “a saying worthy of all acceptance.”

6. Examine yourselves respecting your belief and practice of the Gospel. Have you indeed received these glad tidings of salvation? Do you confide in Christ for justification and glorification? If it be so then; what influence has this hope on your mind? Has it humbled you, under a sense of personal corruption and manifold sins against God? Has it convinced you that you cannot be saved by your own obedience to the law; and that you must take refuge in the merits of Jesus, who justifieth the ungodly, when they repent and believe in his name?

And what effect has your professed faith in Christ produced on your conduct towards God and man? Do you love the Lord, and study “to serve him acceptably with reverence and godly fear?” Is his glory the aim and scope of all your thoughts, words, and actions? Do humility, self-renunciation, faith, hope, love, joy in the Holy Ghost, deadness to the vanities of this world, and a growing meetness for heaven, attest that you have “not received the grace of God in vain?” Are you upright in your dealings with men? Do you endeavour to instruct the ignorant, and point them to the salvation which is in Christ?

These are the best evidences of your conversion. If you possess them in some degree already, and desire to have them confirmed within you, then you have reason to conclude that your state is truly hopeful; and that if you "endure unto the end, you shall be everlastingly saved."

But if, on the contrary, you rest in the form of religion, without feeling its inward power to enlighten and sanctify the heart, if you remain destitute of the fruits of faith and love, you have reason to tremble, lest, dying in such a state, you should at last "have your portion with hypocrites and unbelievers."

• Mark xiii. 13.

LECTURE LXV.

ON THE WISDOM OF MAKING THE SALVATION OF OUR SOULS THE SUPREME OBJECT OF OUR PURSUIT.

1 Timothy 4—8. *Godliness is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

THE mind, properly speaking, constitutes the man. It is the rational soul which gives us such a decided superiority over the rest of the animal creation. Our bodies are but external coverings, to defend the immortal tenant which resides within them.

Now, as it is the precious jewel which the casket contains that is the object of so much solicitude, so it is the soul of man that claims his first care and attention. To watch against any injury to which it may be exposed, and to provide for its interests, should be our daily concern. Every thing should be made subservient to its welfare. Our business, studies, and recreations, should all be conducted with reference to the spiritual advantage of our souls.

A concise view of its nature and capacities will shew that such anxiety to promote its happiness is highly judicious.

The soul is not earthly, but heavenly in its extraction : its Maker is God : " He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul^a."

This language leads us to regard it as a work of a supernatural kind ; and that it really is such, its faculties clearly determine. The conception and imagination, the understanding, the will, the memory, the conscience, and the different volitions of the human mind, shew that, in his soul, man bears a faint resemblance to, and is an emanation of, the Deity.

2. It is immortal : and this stamps upon it a value inestimably great ; because it is thereby rendered capable of endless misery or perpetual joy. God has endowed it with a principle of immortality ; so that it cannot be destroyed, either by time or accident.

These considerations justify the conduct of those persons, who, aware of the dignity and worth of the soul, are willing to make any sacrifice which is requisite to secure its salvation. And indeed, when we weigh things in the scales of reason and Scripture, what are even thrones, or kingdoms, or riches, or glory, or any of those gilded baubles which men so eagerly grasp at, in comparison with " the unsearchable riches of Christ," and that felicity which he will hereafter give to every one who has faithfully served him in his Church below. " What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? or what shall a man give in exchange for his

^a Gen. ii. 7.

soul?" From these premises, we infer that the salvation of our souls should be a concern of primary importance to us all, the attainment of which we ought to labour after incessantly.

Reason and Religion allow us to employ a considerable share of our time in procuring food for the body. We are permitted, nay, commanded by God, to be "diligent in business". We are, moreover, told, in order to guard us against the pernicious consequences of sloth, "if any man provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel".

3. Whilst, however, in obedience to the word of God, we honestly pursue our respective callings, that we may acquire "the bread which perisheth," it is important to remember that we have other and higher wants to supply. Provision must also be made for the soul, or else "it will be destroyed for lack of knowledge." Our spiritual necessities are far greater than most of us imagine. The generality of mankind think that a formal prayer offered up once now and then, and an occasional attendance at Church, are quite sufficient for the nourishment of the soul. But if the inward man is to be renewed day by day, if it is to be kept vigorous and healthy, if the graces of the Spirit are to flourish within us, then let us bear in mind that these great objects cannot be secured, unless constant aid is sought and obtained from God. To render our souls prosperous in the Divine life, daily prayer, and the devotion of the heart to God, are necessary; for neither the soul nor the body can continue in good health, without frequent support.

Every method, therefore, should be used, which

^b Rom. xii. 11.

^c 1 Tim. v. 8.

the kindness of the Almighty has contrived, to advance our spiritual prosperity.

4. Reader, art thou without an interest in the benefits flowing from the death of Christ? The first thing to be done is, to see your need of His atoning blood, to pardon, to justify, to sanctify, and save your soul from the bitter pains of eternal death, and to supplicate this mercy, with earnestness, from God, until it be obtained^c. When the heart is thus converted to the proper knowledge of God and of itself, when it is acquainted with its own inability to do good, it will be made willing to accept the grace of the Holy Ghost, that it may improve in righteousness to the glory of the Lord.

Have we, then, been really quickened by the Spirit of Christ to a new life? Are we truly sensible of our spiritual wants? If we have attained this knowledge of our state, we shall see the expediency of using every means "to make our calling and election sure." We are aware, under such convictions, that we have a battle to fight, a crown to obtain, which can only be gained by the most determined valour and perseverance, displayed unto the close of our lives.

On these grounds, the care of the soul, which is "the one thing supremely needful" recommended by our Lord, should certainly occupy a portion of our time and attention each successive day. Indeed, that knowledge of Christ, which avails to salvation, will not be given unto us, except we seek it constantly, diligently, and with the utmost sincerity.

5. Learn, from the avidity with which men pursue their temporal callings, with what ardour of mind you should follow after the things which belong unto

^c Matt. vii. 7, 8.

your peace, before they are for ever hid from your eyes^d. See the tradesman, how intent is he upon the gains arising from business! He rises early, and late takes rest, and loads himself with anxious cares, to acquire riches, and the comforts which they procure. Observe the merchant! He sends his ships across the sea, to distant countries, from whence they may return freighted with the most valuable productions. The sailor will undertake the most dangerous voyage, and brave all the fury of the storm, stimulated by the hope of making some discovery, or of acquiring some advantage that will repay him for the hazard which he consents to run.

Now the objects which they pursue with such unwearied diligence, are transient as the shadow; yea, their whole worth and usefulness are strictly confined to the present life. If, then, such short-lived things are thought to possess sufficient importance to induce men to expose their life, to forego pleasure, and to submit to pain and trouble in acquiring them, how entirely inexcusable must those persons be, who are reluctant to use the means for attaining the salvation of their souls, which will render them infinitely happier than they could be made by an abundance of wealth, fame, or any other temporal enjoyment whatever. The prize which the Gospel sets before us is of such magnitude, that it might well inflame our desires to gain it. Surely a kingdom of eternal duration, where all sorrow and sighing will flee away—all misery be for ever banished, and lasting happiness abound, should have attractions enough to call forth our warmest endeavours to obtain it! But, alas! the world, with its ensnaring pleasures, has such a fatal hold of most men's affections,

^d Luke xix. 41, 42.

that it withdraws their attention from Divine things, which ought to have the chief place in their esteem.

6. There are, however, some happy souls, of a more elevated cast, who, grateful to God for the temporal mercies which they enjoy, aspire after communion with him, and the manifestations of his pardoning love, as the most satisfying portion. Thankful for the bounty of a kind providence, their daily cry is, "Lord, lift thou the light of thy countenance upon us!" "Grant us thy blessing, and life for evermore!" "Remember us, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people. O visit us with thy salvation! that we may see the good of Thy chosen, that we may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation, and may glory with Thine inheritance!"

7. There can be no reasonable doubt, whatever the world may think to the contrary, but that such a choice of Divine pleasures, in preference to those which are earthly, is the result of the highest wisdom which a finite being can exercise.

Worldlings will, perhaps, be ready to stigmatize those who pay a suitable regard to the interests of their souls, with the opprobrious epithets of fools, fanatics, and madmen. But what avails all the abuse with which bad men load the conduct of the good? Death will soon put an end to their ungodly strife and opposition; and decide, for ever, who are wise, and who are foolish—the wicked, or the righteous; those who serve God, or those who disobey him.

But there is no necessity for referring the determination of this point to the "hour of death and the day of judgment;" since God has already determined it, and left his decision on record for the instruction of all ages. "The fear of the Lord is

* Psalm iii. 6.

'ib. cxxxiii. 3.

'ib. cvi. 4—6.

the beginning of wisdom ;—a good understanding have all they who do His commandments : His praise endureth for ever^b.”

The following lines convey a just reproof to those who reject the Gospel, under an opinion of their own superior wisdom :—

“ Wrong not the Christian ; think not reason your’s ;
 ’Tis reason our Great Master holds so dear ;
 ’Tis reason’s injur’d rights his wrath resents ;
 ’Tis reason’s voice obey’d, his glories crown ;—
 To give lost reason life, he pour’d his own.
 Believe, and shew the reason of a man ;
 Believe, and taste the pleasure of a God ;
 Believe, and look with triumph on the tomb :
 Through reason’s wounds alone thy faith can die ;
 Which dying, tenfold terror gives to death,
 And dips in venom his twice mortal sting^{bb}.”

Who then will venture to question the truth of God’s declaration, who pronounces those only happy and wise who honour him by a strict observance of his precepts ? The final end of the righteous fully justifies their pious conduct, their self-denial, their tears, and the tribulations which they experience on earth. After their pilgrimage is finished, they die to inherit the kingdom which God has prepared for them that love him. But who can tell how great that bliss is which awaits the favoured servants of the Lord¹ ? The bare prospect of it should excite in us a holy desire to become wise unto salvation, that we may share in the happiness of his people.

8. This blessedness lies within our reach, and may be obtained by diligent seeking. “ Then shall ye find me, when ye seek me with all your heart¹¹.”

Conscious of having spent too much time in the

^b Psalm cxi. 10.

^{bb} Young, Night iv.

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

¹¹ Jer. xxix. 13.

pursuit of things which will soon vanish away, resolve in future to live more in the practice of piety and righteousness. Your souls must exist for ever in happiness or misery. Be it your care to prosecute their welfare with unremitting assiduity. Seek to be justified by faith in Christ; and then, with those glorified spirits which surround the throne of God, you will be able to rejoice evermore in his love, and say, "Praised be the God of my salvation!"

LECTURE LXVI.

THE FOLLY, CRIMINALITY, AND DANGER, OF NEGLECTING
OUR SALVATION.

Mark viii. 36, 37. *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

EVERY rational being feels a desire to be happy. The various pursuits of men have happiness, in some shape or other, for their professed object; though it is obvious that the nature of this good is mistaken by some; and sought for, by others, where it is not to be found.

There are, but comparatively, few who discover that true happiness is no where to be found, but in the knowledge, love, and approbation of God. Hence the generality of men, taken up with the pleasures or the occupations of this transitory life, agree to treat religion, which is the only source of true joy, with neglect and indifference; as if it were a fable, or a tale, in which they have no interest, or as if it had no benefits to confer which deserve their attention.

We can easily trace the causes to which such culpable negligence may be ascribed.

1. Men are tempted to neglect their salvation,

through an undue pursuit of, and attachment to, secular things. Some worldly object—such as riches, honour, pleasure, fame—captivates their minds. The gratification of some darling lust, some iniquitous desire, leads them astray from God, and gives them a distaste for the pure enjoyments of the Gospel of Christ.

But it is a thought which merits their serious consideration, Whether any momentary advantages, to be derived from these corrupt sources, will countervail the final loss of their souls, and that bliss which constitutes the blessedness of the saints in heaven? Can it be really believed, that the pleasure arising from any temporal good will compensate a man for the forfeiture of eternal life?

In the hurry of business, in the midst of carnal and depraved gratifications, men may indulge these fatal mistakes; but death will undeceive them, and exhibit most fully the absurdity of setting their hearts upon those vain objects which now allure them.

“Men may live fools;
But fools they cannot die.”

2. The fear of reproach deters many from embracing religion, and acting as it directs. They see some of those who have the courage to avow an open regard for Christ, persecuted, and treated with derision by the profane and the irreligious: for this reason, they are afraid to range themselves under the banner of Christ, lest it should expose them to the same illiberal treatment. The laugh of the world is more than they are willing to bear, for any benefits which they expect from religion; and therefore they are content to forego them, rather than endure reproach from their fellow-creatures. Forful of the encouraging promises of support which is made to his faithful people, they shrink

• Mat. xvi. 26.

back from the cross, as if it were too heavy to be borne. And what is this, but to cast an unjust reflection upon the Lord, and to say His service is a grievous yoke, to which they will not submit?

Jehovah reproves this cowardly spirit, by saying, "I, even I, am He that comforteth you. Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth?" But, if this rebuke has not the effect intended by it, such fearful persons should listen to the threatenings of God against them, and ask, Which is most easy to endure, the momentary laugh of their fellow-worms, or the dread frown of God without intermission? He has told us of the consequences that will hereafter attend a denial of His name and cause from worldly motives: "Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him, also, shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh, in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels^b."

How necessary, then, is the exhortation of Christ, to all who either hesitate or dread to follow him, lest they should be reviled by the world: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell^c."

From the foregoing observations, we see that an inordinate love of the world, or a desire of sensual pleasures, or a disinclination to encounter persecution for the Gospel, leads multitudes to deny Christ,

^a Isa. li. 12, 13.

^b Mark viii. 38.

^c Matt. x. 28.

and incur the condemnation and punishment of his avowed enemies.

That we may expose such conduct in its proper colours, we will venture to pronounce it—

3. Absurd; because it is the direct way to deprive ourselves of the only kind of happiness which is adequate to the wants of the soul; which can never be happy, but as it becomes holy through faith in Christ our Redeemer. The vain things which the worldling pursues with so much avidity have no power whatever to gratify a spiritual mind; and they often leave an aching void, which proclaims their insufficiency^{cc}.

The testimony of the accomplished Lord Chesterfield, who had largely drank of the intoxicating cup of worldly pleasure, is so decisive of its emptiness, that it should stop the ardour of carnal men, and save them the trouble of wading through so much mire, to grasp at bubbles, that will soon burst, and disappoint their hopes for ever. “I have run the silly rounds of business and pleasure; and I have done with them all. I have enjoyed all the pleasures of the world; and know their futility, and do not regret their loss. I appraise them at their real value—which, in truth, is very low; whereas those who have not experienced, always overrate them: they only see their gay outside, and are dazzled with their glare. I have been behind the scene; I have seen all the coarse pulleys and dirty ropes which exhibit and move the gaudy machine, to the astonishment and admiration of an ignorant multitude. I can hardly persuade myself that all that frivolous hurry, and bustle, and pleasure of the world had any

^{cc} Eccl. i. 14.

reality ; but I look upon all that is passed as one of those romantic dreams which opium commonly occasions ; and I do by no means desire to repeat the nauseous dose, for the sake of the fugitive dream."

Is it then, O sinner ! for trifles such as these, you are willing to part with heaven, and relinquish all its glories ? Is it for such toys, you will consent to barter away an "inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away ?" Is it for "the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season," you will venture to provoke God, and incur eternal wrath ? Surely you will do well to reflect upon the wretchedness that must finally result from such a choice, before you resolve to make it, and to continue in practices which are so replete with danger to your soul.

4. We may pronounce a neglect of our spiritual welfare highly criminal.

God positively enjoins us to repent of and forsake our sins ; and to seek from Him a new heart and holy affections, in order that we may be purified from vain thoughts and vicious desires, and walk before him unblameably in love.

Now, to despise his injunctions, or to neglect to obey them from any motive whatever, is to defy his authority, to deprive him of his Sovereignty over us, and to engage in overt rebellion against him. To act in such a spirit, even towards an earthly monarch, would be deemed a capital offence. And, is it less wicked and treasonable thus to behave towards the Mighty God, "by whom kings reign, and princes decree justice ?"

5. The neglect of our salvation is attended with the utmost peril. We cannot be destitute of faith in Christ and those holy dispositions and habits

which it generates, and at the same time be fit for everlasting life. It is the irrevocable decree of God, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord^d." "There shall in no wise enter into heaven any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life^e." This sanctity of heart must be sought for in the use of those means prescribed by the Gospel.

Now, if, in this way, men will not, through sloth or love of worldly vanities, try to acquire the glory of Paradise, they must be abandoned to their fate, and fall victims to an obstinate attachment to evil.

And do not they justly deserve to perish eternally, who will not make the slightest sacrifice, nor the weakest effort, to secure those blessings of salvation which the mercy of God holds up to their view? Should we not think a dying man extremely culpable, if he were to reject the medicine which would effect his restoration to health? And will not they be worthy of punishment, who deliberately refuse "to believe and to obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ^f," which is the only remedy for the recovery of their souls to spiritual life and happiness?

What should we say, if we were to see a man lying in a state of calm unconcern, whilst he knew his house was on fire, and himself liable to be burnt to death every moment? We should not hesitate to affirm that such stupidity was the effect of insanity, rather than of courage; yea, of a total disregard to that self-preservation which is the first law of nature.

And what judgment must we pronounce concern-

^d Heb. xii. 14.

^e Rev. xxi. 27.

^f 2 Thess. i. 7—10.

ing those persons, who can hear, from the mouth of God, of "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched?" who can behold the flames kindling and raging around them, without trying to escape from "the wrath to come?" This is a species of madness which cannot be sufficiently reprobated.

6. Art thou, Reader, one of those thoughtless beings, who canst suffer death and judgment to come suddenly upon thee, without any concern, without any care to provide thyself with that righteousness of Christ which alone can "present thee faultless before the throne of God with exceeding great joy?"

Oh, remember, before it be too late, that a thousand considerations suggest to you the wisdom and the necessity of cultivating an acquaintance with the religion of Christ!

The hour of your dissolution is drawing nigh, when you must give an account of yourself to God. Will the death-bed of that man be free from anguish and fearful anticipations of future wrath, who has insulted his God, and trifled away the gracious season allowed him for working out his salvation? To prevent the remorse which a review of a misspent life will sooner or later occasion, be wise now, and consider your latter end: yea, through the grace of God, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

Furthermore, constantly recollect, that soon "the trumpet of the archangel shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible;" and then all the glory of this world, and every vain object which has ensnared your heart, will vanish away". And how painful will the reflection be, that, for the sake of such transitory things, you have lost the favour of God,

and plunged your soul into eternal ruin! The recollection that you might have been happy, if you had listened to the voice of God, will add new horrors to your exquisite sufferings.

Think about these momentous truths; and, by earnest supplication, strive to attain that spirituality of mind which is "life and peace^c." The grace of God can alter the bias of your heart from evil to good. And when you submit to its Divine influence, it will impart a felicity of which you had previously no conception—pleasures, satisfying in their nature, and eternal in their duration. Follow, then, "after godliness, which is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come^d."

^c Rom. viii. 6.

^d 1 Tim. iv. 8.

IMPEDIMENTS TO A RELIGIOUS LIFE.

LECTURE LXVII.

ON UNBELIEF.

Heb. iii. 12. *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the Living God.*

THERE are many obstructions in the way of a man who is desirous to walk with God; which must be removed, before he can advance, with steady and certain steps, towards the kingdom of glory. These impediments, every one, who is solicitous to honour God and to secure eternal happiness, will be as anxious to remove and surmount, as the racers in the Grecian Games were to cast off their superfluous garments, that they might not be hindered in their course^a.

^a Heb. xii. 1, 2. 1 Cor. ix. 24—27.

Those obstacles which lie in the way of our spiritual improvement, are, unbelief, a worldly life, self-righteousness, and hypocrisy.

We begin with the sin of unbelief, which is the great impediment to the salvation of our souls.

1. The essence of this condemning sin consists in discrediting and rejecting the testimony of God. Now, that He is every way deserving of the entire confidence of his rational creatures, cannot be disputed, without the utmost impiety. His unalterable veracity and righteousness render it "impossible that God should lie." He can be under no temptation to deceive us; and therefore we may safely believe, and implicitly receive, as undoubted truth, whatever he has revealed: and we should submit to it with reverence and godly fear.

It were to be wished that the Lord of Hosts should be thus honoured by all: yet it is but too obvious, that many either do not believe his word, or, at least, act as if their faith was merely notional; since it has no practical influence upon their behaviour towards God and man. So that if they are not avowed unbelievers in principle, they really are so in practice; and this will at last subject them to the same condemnation as if they had made an open avowal of infidelity^a.

Unbelief is a sin which is common to the offspring of Adam, and is one of the leading features of that depravity which they bring with them into the world; and which they evince, by rejecting the revealed word of God as the standard of faith and practice, by distrusting his promises, defying his threatenings, and disobeying his commands.

^a Mat. xxv. 30. Luke xii. 45, 46.

2. This is the most grievous affront that can be offered to God, whose honour is thereby called in question. It is a direct attack upon his fidelity; as if He had falsified his word, broken his covenant, and, consequently, was utterly unworthy of the least credit or respect.

The criminality of such conduct will appear more glaring, if it be considered that we receive the testimony of mankind when it is supported by sufficient evidence; and to reject it under such circumstances, is justly thought to be carrying our incredulity to an unwarrantable length. "If, then, we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, and is unquestionably entitled to the highest credit. He, therefore, that believeth not God, hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record which God hath given of his Son^b."

Unbelief, then, insults God, by taxing him with positive falsehood, disbelieving his testimony, and treating him as if he was not worthy of the same degree of credence which we attach to the report of our fellow-creatures. And must not this be regarded by Jehovah as a crime of the deepest dye? Can the Majesty of Heaven feel no concern whether His word be doubted or believed? Can He allow the imputation of falsehood, without considering himself dishonoured, and without punishing the aggravated offence? No; he will surely visit "the unbelievers" with the same wrath reserved for abandoned sinners^{bb}. The word of truth avers, "He that believeth not shall be damned^c."

The punishment denounced against unbelief, proves there is great guilt, malignity, and enmity, connected

^b 1 John v. 9, 10.

^{bb} Rev. xxi. 8.

^c Mark xvi. 16.

with it. Indeed, it is always reproached as a most heinous sin, and as the fruitful parent of every other transgression which unregenerate persons commit.

In the time of our Lord, it was that particular sin which hindered men from receiving the Gospel. Hence, on one occasion, it is said, "He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief^c;" and, on another, "He upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart^d."

3. The mischievous effects occasioned by unbelief were not peculiar to the age in which Christ lived. It is still the deadly bane which poisons the souls of men, and incapacitates them for a life of faith and godliness. Unbelief hardens the heart, and shuts men's eyes to the misery and danger of their sinful condition. Those who are under its controul fancy themselves so "whole, that they have no need of the Physician." Through this awful conceit, the provisions of the Gospel are despised as totally superfluous. Now, what is this, but to impeach the wisdom of Heaven, and to make the sacrifice of Christ of none effect?

Further; unbelief is not a solitary offence: it engenders every evil thought and deed; for it makes the soul deaf to all the rebukes of conscience and the word of God. If men really believed that the Lord would fulfil the threatened vengeance of his word against their iniquities, they would not dare to commit them with such fearless unconcern. A realizing view of His hatred to sin, and love of righteousness, would make them desirous "to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord." But, whilst the veil of unbelief remains untaken away from their minds^e, it is not surprising if they should still go on wickedly,

^c Mat. xiii. 58.

^d Mark xvi. 14.

^e 2 Cor. iii, 14—18.

adding sin to sin, until the measure of their guilt is filled up, and their destruction is completed.

4. The consequences which unbelief involves are truly alarming. It brings the unbeliever into a state of actual condemnation ; and places him under a sentence of death, which will be assuredly executed hereafter, if he does not repent, and believe and obey the Gospel. "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only-begotten Son of God^f."

The unbeliever is accursed of God, whose indignation resteth on him. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him^g." Awful words ! But much more terrific is the state which they represent. Can any one, who is held by the chains of unbelief, read such a declaration, and not tremble ? And should not all, who feel its dreadful power in alienating their hearts from God, supplicate his grace to counteract it, lest it should prove their ruin^h ?

5. Unbelieving Reader, canst thou hear these things without the most painful emotion ? Canst thou be easy in the indulgence of this sin ; whilst it not only exposes thee to the Divine anger throughout eternity, but causes it, even now in this life, to light and remain upon thy devoted head ? Oh, be secured from this impending misery, by fleeing to "Jesus Christ, who is an Advocate with the Father, and who is also the propitiation for our sinsⁱ !" Faith in His blood can effectually remove the foulest stains of guilt which thy unfaithful heart has contracted. "Wilt thou not be made clean ? When shall it once be^j ?"

^f John iii. 18.

^g ib. 36.

^h Ezek. xviii. 30.

ⁱ 1 John ii. 1, 2.

^j Jer. xiii. 27.

6. Christian, be on your guard against an unbelieving state of mind ; for this sin is a principal cause of that unfruitfulness which is found amongst those who profess to be the disciples of Christ. Be mindful of the solemn caution given to you by St. Paul : " Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day ; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end^k."

Resist, then, the most distant approaches to this sin ; lest, if it be cherished in your bosom, it should gain such an ascendancy, as to carry you out to lengths of iniquity that will drown you in perdition.

7. Sincere inquirers after God pray for the removal of unbelief ; because it will prove a serious obstacle, as long as you are under its influence, to your prosperity in a religious course. The graces of the Spirit, " love, joy, faith, hope, meekness, peace, long-suffering, temperance, goodness, and gentleness^l," cannot flourish in a faithless heart.

Means, such as God has appointed, should be used, in dependence on his grace for the cure of your unbelief. Meditation on his sacred word, with prayer for a right understanding of it, and a firm conviction that the curses which it threatens and the blessings which it promises will be punctually fulfilled—together with an honest determination to act, in all respects, conformably to its sacred directions—will be found eminently serviceable for check-

^k Heb. iii. 12—15.

^l Gal. v. 22—24.

ing the power of this condemning sin, and giving the heart a right disposition towards the Lord and his spiritual service.

But, especially, pray for the bestowment of a true and lively faith in Christ, which will unite you to him in the closest bonds, and enable you to live in all holy obedience to the Divine will. Faith derives, from the rich fulness of grace treasured up in Jesus for the necessities of his people, that spiritual aid and strength which will enable you to resist the assaults of unbelief, to exercise an holy affiance in the promises of God, to persevere in well-doing, to overcome the world, and to secure "the crown of righteousness, even an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time^m."

▪ 1 Pet. i. 3—6.

LECTURE LXVIII.

ON SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Rey. iii. 17, 18. *Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked : I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.*

WHEN man fell from God, he lost that righteousness of soul in which he was created: but, though he felt conscious of having transgressed the positive command of Heaven, he endeavoured to justify his crime, and lessen the guilt of his revolt from God, by any palliating excuse which he could offer:—"The

woman, whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat^a." Thus he not only upbraided God for the gift bestowed upon him, but discovered a self-justifying spirit, which always opposes a most formidable barrier to our salvation.

That self-righteous temper which the loss of primeval integrity has induced is common to every son and descendant of Adam : it is a striking feature of that "deceitful and wicked heart^b," which is natural to men ; and which nothing but the grace of God, in regenerating us to a new and holy and spiritual state, can ever restrain ; for a tincture of this proud accursed spirit remains in the souls of contrite believers, mars their religious duties, and holds them, frequently, in a sort of legal bondage, which is foreign to the liberty and privileges of the Gospel^c. Nor can they reasonably expect to be entirely freed from its insinuating power until death, "when they shall awake up with the likeness of God^d," and be perfect in holiness for ever.

1. Self-righteousness shews itself in the erroneous judgment which men form respecting their religious condition before God. Self-righteous persons form an estimate of their state which is contrary to Scriptural truth. They fancy themselves good and upright in the whole tenor of their conduct, and such characters as must necessarily be acceptable to God, and entitled to his favour on this account. Puffed up with a high conceit of the rectitude of their hearts, because, forsooth, they may abstain from common or scandalous offences, they give themselves credit for possessing a degree of sanctity, of which they are utterly destitute. It

^a Gen. iii. 12.

^c John viii. 35, 36. Rom. viii. 14—22.

^b Jer. xvii. 9.

^d Psalm xvii. 15.

is not surprising, therefore, if, feeling a sense of their own importance, they should say to their fellow-sinners, "Stand by yourselves; come not near to us; for we are holier than you^{dd}."

The worst feature in the evil principle which we are describing is, that it is a virtual denial of the righteousness and atonement of Christ, which are opposed by it as unnecessary and useless. Self-justifying characters are so entirely carried away by spiritual pride, as to feel unwilling to lie under any obligation to the merits of the Redeemer of sinners for acceptance with God. Like the great body of the Jews, in the time of St. Paul, "they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth^e."

2. Self-righteousness manifests itself in a scrupulous attachment to the ceremonies and outward forms of religion. Such persons as are imbued with this spirit, pray, and perform a constant round of external duties in which their hearts are not engaged, and from which they can never reap any benefit: for, whilst they hold "the form of godliness, they deny and disparage its power," as the wildest enthusiasm and folly^f. Thus, like the Pharisees, whose unholy spirit they have imbibed, "they make clean the outside of the cup and the platter, but their inward part is full of ravening and wickedness^g." Their object is, to keep up a specious appearance of religion; though they are careless about that sanctification of their souls which is absolutely necessary to

^{dd} Isa. lxv. 5.

^f 2 Tim. iii. 5.

^e Rom. x. 3, 4.

^g Luke xi. 39.

please God^a. So that the religion of the self-righteous consists in mere “bodily exercise, which profiteth little^b,” in externals, without any feeling of love to God, or devotion of spirit;—in a word, it consumes its strength in ceremonious observances; whilst the disorders of the fallen heart are not rectified, nor the conduct at all affected by such a worthless parade of piety.

3. Self-righteousness not only spends itself in a regard to the mere shadows and rites of religion, but attaches a high value to them, and rests on an attention to them for the rewards of the eternal state. Into this fatal delusion millions of nominal professing Christians fall. Substituting the outward signs of godliness for its inward and spiritual grace, they mistakenly imagine that they not only do all which is required of them, but even make God their debtor, by a cold hypocritical service, which He abominates. Accounting themselves righteous, because they are not openly and notoriously wicked, they see no need of mercy from God to pardon their sins, nor of Christ’s righteousness to justify, nor of the influence of the Holy Ghost to sanctify them; but, on the contrary, they think it would be unjust in God not to recompense their service, marred as it is by a thousand defects, with “a crown of glory that fadeth not away^{hh}.” Hence these self-justiciaries, whatever they may profess, do not make Christ, but themselves, the saviour of their souls; and place a firm reliance on the sufficiency of their own merits to satisfy every requirement of the Law and the Gospel, and to “make themselves meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”

^a 1 Thess. iv. 5. ^b 1 Tim. iv. 8. ^{hh} Luke xxviii. 9—15.

It will be easy to shew the fallacy and danger of this destructive principle.

4. It argues the most complete ignorance of the unspotted perfection of God. He is absolutely holy, just, and right, and without iniquity¹. Now, it becomes creatures so depraved as fallen men, not to think themselves righteous, but sinful; and to cherish that poverty of spirit² which God esteems. He filleth those who hunger and thirst after his righteousness, with good things³; but sendeth those, who fancy they are rich in spiritual attainments and privileges, empty away⁴.

5. Self-righteousness betrays an utter ignorance of the extensive demands of God's law; which is spiritual, and consequently reaches to the imaginations and thoughts of the heart, as well as to our outward actions. If our obedience does not consist of a spotless and righteous life, without the least deviation therefrom for a single moment, the law condemns us as transgressors, who must perish, without an interest in Christ to save us from deserved wrath.

Now, on comparing our best deeds by this standard, we shall find "there is none righteous, no not one;" yea, that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" and, consequently, that to set up any claim to the favour of Heaven on the footing of self-merit, is arrogant and presumptuous in the extreme: for it is declared, by the voice of Truth, "that by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

¹ Deut. xxii. 4.

² Mat. v. 3.

³ Luke i. 53.

⁴ Mat. v. 6.

¹ Rom. iii. 10.

² ib. iii. 23.

³ Rom. iii. 20.

6. Such a proud state of mind must be as highly offensive to God, as it is derogatory to the glory of Christ. It is an insult to God, by impeaching his wisdom in providing redemption for us through the mediation of his beloved Son^o: and it detracts from the honour of our Saviour, by rejecting His atonement, “whom God hath set forth to be the only propitiation for our sins^p.” This is an offence of great magnitude; and, where it is obstinately persisted in, must, in the end, meet with the heaviest measure of punishment. “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace^q.”

7. Self-righteousness evinces a thorough ignorance of our own condition. Whilst our eyes are blinded by the hardening influence of sin, we shall remain in gross darkness, and be entire strangers to ourselves: but the moment this veil of spiritual ignorance is removed from our minds, self-knowledge will teach us, instead of attempting to establish our own righteousness, to acknowledge, “Behold, we are vile^r!” “We have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now our eyes see thee. Wherefore we abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes^s.” Discerning the corrupt state of our souls, and recollecting how many evil thoughts have sprung up within us, and by how many positive acts of sin our lives have been defiled, “We shall exclaim, “Woe unto us! for we are undone; because we are

^o Eph. i. 6—8.

^p Rom. iii. 24, 25.

^q Heb. x. 28, 29.

^r Job xl. 4.

^s Job xlii. 5, 6.

men of unclean lips[†].” “Behold, we were shapen in iniquity, and in sin did our mothers conceive us[‡]!” Seeing the ruined and condemned state into which our unrighteousness has plunged us, and deprecating the wrath of God, to which we stand exposed, we shall each of us cry with David, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified[§].”

8. This sinful temper is a most serious obstacle to our growth in knowledge and grace. Whilst we have such lofty notions of our own inherent goodness, we shall imagine ourselves whole, and think we have no need of Christ, the heavenly Physician^{*}. So long as we cherish a self-justifying spirit, we shall be destitute of the Christian virtues of self-abasement and self-renunciation; we shall be disposed to pour contempt on the sacrifice of Christ, which atones for our numberless iniquities; on his Spirit, who regenerates and sanctifies our souls; and on his glorious robe of righteousness, which covers our manifold defects, and presents us “faultless before the throne of God with exceeding great joy.”

9. Are you, then, confined in the prison of self-righteousness? Do you conceive yourself holy, because you do not give into those scandalous vices which disgrace the lives of many other persons? Ignorant of the dark and wicked state of your own heart, do you suppose that an occasional act of charity, and a lifeless and insincere performance of customary religious duties, is all that the law exacts, as necessary to entitle you to heaven? Filled with a sense of fancied excellence, are you ready, in the pride of your heart, to cry, “What lack I yet?” Do

[†] Isa. vi. 5.

[‡] Psalm cxliii. 2.

^{*} Psalm li. 5.

[§] Mat. ix. 12.

you discover no need of the Holy Spirit's influence, to quicken you from the death of sin to a life of righteousness? Are you satisfied with your present state, as if you were already sufficiently good, wise, and instructed in the things of God^{xx}? Then you adduce the most glaring proofs that you are under the self-complacent delusion which we have been exposing; and that you belong to "a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness^x."

Now, if you adhere to a system which so directly militates against the glory of God, disparages the atonement of Christ, despises the work of the Holy Spirit, and compels you to reject the Gospel, what can you expect at last, but that God should say, "I will declare thy righteousness and thy works; they shall not profit thee^{yy}?" And then "he will lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail of his indignation shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place^z." And how will you feel confounded, when you see the fabric, which you have raised on this foundation of sand, suddenly demolished, and yourself buried for ever in its ruins^a!

10. To prevent a disaster so tremendous in its results, cherish the principles of the Gospel; which will produce humility for sin, and a state of feeling the very reverse of those towering notions which have hitherto unhappily possessed your mind.

Let a sense of the total corruption of your nature, which is the source from whence your evil actions originate, humble you in the very dust of self-abasement; and, whilst it forces you to exclaim with the

^{xx} Mat. xix. 20.

^y Prov. xxx. 12.

^{yy} Isa. lvii. 12.

^z Isa. xxviii. 17—21.

^a Mat. vii. 26—29.

lepers, "Unclean, unclean!" let it teach you to pray, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!" And let a conviction of your inability to save yourself by any performances of your own, bring you to Christ by faith, "for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption;" that, according as it is written, "let him that glorieth, glory only in the Lord."

11. And as for you, Christian Believers, who occasionally feel the leaven of a self-righteous temper working in your hearts, and inducing you, at times, either to forget Christ, the Rock of your salvation, or not to look to him sufficiently for grace and strength to invigorate your souls and make them fruitful, watch and pray against the sin which is productive of such bitter fruits.

Conscious of your short comings, and your need of a complete righteousness to save you, exercise the same unshaken faith in Jesus for justification, as the prophet Isaiah did, who said, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God: for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

And demonstrate that your confidence in Christ is according to knowledge, by its tendency to "cleanse you from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, and to make you solicitous to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord."

^b Psalm li. 10.

^c Isa. lxi. 10.

^d 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

^e 2 Cor. vii. 1.

LECTURE LXIX.

ON HYPOCRISY.

Job xxvii. 8. *For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?*

THE Lord, who sees the heart, and knows all its designs, highly approves of sincerity in them that engage in his service. He esteems the strongest pretensions of regard to him as deceit, and the most costly sacrifice as a splendid abomination in his sight, if they are unaccompanied with the sincere devotion of the mind. "Behold! thou requirest truth in the inward parts^a." Aware of this, David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me^b!"

1. Now hypocrisy is directly opposed to sincerity. It is the acting of a base and dishonourable part, under the mask of honesty and virtue. Wicked men act hypocritically from sinister motives: they practice on the credulity of others, in order to gain their confidence, and thus to accomplish their own iniquitous designs.

When the term is used in a religious signification, it imports the assumption of a profession of godliness which is not real; the putting on of pious appearances which are false, with a view to cover the deceit of the heart, and to obtain some worldly advantage.

2. This is a sin to which great reproach is always attached. Hypocrisy is everywhere detestable; but in religion it becomes a crime of a peculiarly aggravating nature. In reference to men, it is a species of imposition and falsehood practised

^a Psalm li. 6.

^b ib. 10.

upon their credulity, whereby they are injured, and truth is insulted.

But how increasingly hateful do men appear, when they put on the outward garb of piety to cover the Hypocrisy of their souls! In what light they are viewed by the Searcher of all hearts, may be known from consulting his word. "The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment^d." "What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul^d?"

3. The Scribes and Pharisees, in the time of our Lord, were chargeable with this grievous sin. They pretended to be what they really were not. Christ reprov'd their hypocrisy, and described their character with great exactness. Thus he speaks concerning them: "Do not ye after their works; for they say and do not^e." Their practice did not accord with their profession. What good they did at any time, was, only "to be seen of men^f," and to make an ostentatious shew of counterfeit virtue; for under the cover of pious appearances they concealed the most crying sins. Therefore they were compared to "whited sepulchres; beautiful without, but full of rottenness and defilement within^g."

In their religious duties, the same hypocritical spirit was discoverable. In the solemn act of prayer, when sincerity should mark our thoughts and expressions, the Pharisees made pompous professions of love to God. But He who could penetrate the recesses of their minds, saw the insincerity of their pretensions, and addressed them thus: "Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you, hypocrites! as it is

^e Job xx. 5.

^f Mat. xxiii. 5.

^d ib. xxvii. 8.

^g ib. 27.

^e Mat. xxiii. 8.

written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me^b."

They were scrupulous enough in lesser matters, but neglected the more positive duties prescribed by the Law and the Gospel. "They paid tithe of mint and anise and cumin, but omitted the weightier matters of the Law—righteousness, judgment, mercy, faith, and the love of God^c." They judged others severely for small faults, but spared and vindicated their own more heinous offences^d.

It was not surprising, therefore, that our Lord should have said unto them, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God^e."

4. Such hypocrites are still to be found in the bosom of the professing Church of Christ; and probably some such will remain in it to the end of the Gospel dispensation. Many will, in every age, appear "in sheep's clothing, who are inwardly as ravening wolves^f." Tares will be mingled with the wheat; and both must grow together until the time of harvest, when an eternal separation is to be made^g.

Let us search our own hearts most diligently, that we may see if we can trace any symptoms of this accursed leaven in ourselves. Are we then sincere in our profession of religion? or do we make it from worldly motives, and with a prospect of gain or advantage?

Do we join in the public worship of the sanctuary to glorify the Lord, and, as needy sinners, to obtain his blessing? Do we offer up our petitions for grace

^b Mark vii. 6.

^c Mat. xxiii. 23.

^d ib. 24.

^e Luke xvi. 15.

^f Mat. vii. 15.

^g ib. xiii. 30.

and salvation with a penitent and believing heart; conscious, that without an interest in the redemption of Christ we must endure for ever the merited indignation of the Lord?

When employed in your secret devotions in the closet, and when you assemble your family for prayer every morning and evening, do you engage in this sacred act to please God, and “worship him in spirit and in truth^a?” or, like hypocrites, do you think it expedient to make this outward shew of sanctity before the world, to varnish over the insincerity and deceit of your hearts?

^b When you perform an act of charity, is it done from Pharisaic pride, “to be seen of men,” and to compound for your sins; or purely from a principle of gratitude to God^{an}, and compassion for the indigent?

Whilst you profess the faith which the Gospel enjoins, are you careful to maintain good works, and walk holily before the Lord; hating all unrighteousness, and shunning every wicked practice, even though it may cost you a little self-denial, and be attended with reproach for Christ’s sake? If these are the principles and motives which induce you to assume the Christian name, and if you conscientiously honour God by an upright life, then you are not hypocrites, but true followers of Jesus; and, though your best services may be marked by defects, yet God will accept of your attempts to serve him; and, if you remain stedfast in your obedience to Him, the merciful Lord of heaven and earth will, for the sake of Christ’s righteousness and atonement, admit you into the realms of everlasting bliss.

^a John iv. 24.

^{an} 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

But if, on examination, you find that you have been “dissemblers with God, and that your hearts have not been stedfast in his covenant^o,” be ashamed before him for your iniquity. Bear in mind, that he has seen all your specious acts of hypocrisy, with whatever industry you may have attempted to conceal them from the observation of your fellow-creatures.

What guilt, then, have you incurred before the Majesty of Heaven? How greatly have you dishonoured him, by the mock homage of your lips, and the feigned affection of your souls, whilst your lives have been distinguished only for transgression and deceit and falsehood.

5. Yet there is forgiveness for you, on your repentance and amendment. “Repent, therefore, of this your wickedness; and pray God, if, perhaps, the thoughts of your hearts may be forgiven you^p :” and, in future, hate the least approach to dissimulation. Pray that your “heart may be sound in God’s statutes;” “that you may not be ashamed before Christ, at his coming, but rejoice with exceeding great joy.”

And, as ever you wish to please the Lord, and to advance in the knowledge of the truth, not only abandon every mean and deceitful artifice, but cherish sincerity of heart as an inestimable jewel.

You should be prompted to this line of conduct, because the Spirit of God will not instruct or comfort those “who hold fast deceit, and refuse to let it go^q.” The heart which covertly practises iniquity under the mask of godliness, is an abomination to the Lord. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant^r.”

^o Psalm lxxviii. 36, 37.

^q Jer. viii. 5.

^p Acts viii. 22.

^r Psalm xxv. 14.

“ But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth*.”

6. And let no man avail himself of the hypocrisy of a few professors, as an argument for suspecting the sincerity of all the rest. Blessed be God! there are many who adorn their sacred profession by a righteous life. Their conduct proves that there is a reality in religion, wherever it is savingly embraced.

Let no man, then, think himself at liberty to treat the Gospel as a cunningly-devised fable, because some “hold the truth in unrighteousness,” and dishonour the Christian name. Men of reprobate minds will always convert truth into error, food into poison; and refuse to obey the Gospel, because it demands the utmost integrity of heart and life.

And if hypocrites can discern such excellence in religion, as to deem it worth their while to counterfeit it, this is no mean argument in its defence; since the circulation of base money proves the existence of good, of which it is an imitation. And you should no more despise true religion, nor depreciate its value, because hypocrites abuse it, than you should reject the current coin of the realm, because it is artfully imitated by that which is greatly inferior to it*.

* Psalm xxxiv. 16.

* 2 Tim. iv. 10. 1 John ii. 18, 19.

LECTURE LXX.

ON A WORLDLY, CARELESS, AND SINFUL LIFE.

Mark iv. 19. *The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.*

MOST people do not seem to be aware of the great hazard which they run, by a free intercourse with the world. Regardless of consequences, they sail down the stream of life with giddy unconcern, as if there were no temptations to be encountered, no dangers to be apprehended, and no loss to be incurred. Looking upon the world as being capable of showering blessings upon them which are expected to minister the highest satisfaction, they assiduously court its smiles, and dread its frowns.

It is obvious that this excessive attachment to the world, and this great solicitude to secure its friendship, is founded in ignorance of its real character. Take away the disguise which is put upon it, by some who cover its crimes and vices with soft and imposing names, and weigh its pleasures in the scales of Scriptural truth, and the world will not appear to have a single charm, for the sake of which any man should risk his salvation, and forfeit the joys of Paradise.

“Nevertheless, what saith the Scripture?” What is the testimony which it bears concerning the spirit and condition of the world? Instead of describing it in colours which recommend it to our notice, it is painted by the word of God in a light which proves that we should be afraid to imbibe its spirit, to adopt its guilty maxims, or to imitate its conduct; lest we should finally share its dreadful fate.

The world is represented as being exceedingly depraved; as being in abject submission to the prince of darkness^a; as being a scene of temptation^b, and a disordered state in which there is no lasting repose or happiness^c. Those who know it best are assured, by a long experience of its wickedness and deceit, that this view of the world is correct; and therefore they justly regard it as the enemy of God, and of their own souls; as an implacable foe, with whom they will make no league, and form no intimate connexion.

But do the majority of mankind look at the world in this light, and act towards it in this manner? No. Fond of its ways and maxims, its corrupting pleasures and amusements, they embrace it as a friend, with whom they live on a social footing; whose favour they wish to maintain, and whose displeasure they are afraid to incur, more than the anger of the Most High God.

It may be safely conceded, that so long as we are in the world, we must have more or less intercourse with it: we must transact our business, and provide for our families: but we may perform the proper duties of our station, and yet not give into that worldly spirit which is destructive of true religion in the soul, and which it is the professed design of this discourse to reprove.

1. This unholy temper manifests itself in an undue valuation of the world, and the things of it; in giving a decided preference to its advantages, pleasures, and enjoyments, above the joys of heaven. "Who," says the worldling, in full consistency with his sensual judgment and taste, "will shew me any

^a 1 John v. 19. ^b ib. ii. 15—18. ^c Job iii. 17. Micah ii. 10.

good^d," beyond that which I possess? Thus his heart and affections are exclusively engrossed by earthly objects. His happiness is made up in them, and he looks for satisfaction from them alone. His hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, rise or fall, increase or diminish, with the worldly objects that produce them. If his temporal circumstances are prosperous, he is pleased, and desires nothing better than the poor and wretched satisfaction which they impart. If, on the contrary, his secular schemes miscarry, he is truly miserable; and unable to bear the adverse frowns of fortune (as it is termed), he sometimes has recourse to means which put a period to his sufferings in this life, but awfully aggravate them in the next.

2. We discover the same worldly disposition in unregenerate men, as it respects their ardent pursuit after carnal things; such as, money, pleasure, fame, or any other gratification which the world affords. This restless endeavour to obtain "things which perish in the using," plainly characterizes "the carnal mind, which is enmity with God," and seeks its satisfaction in the inordinate love of this present evil world^e. Those who live under the influence of this wicked spirit, indulge an insatiate thirst after the vanities, fashions, and follies of the age. Their sensual appetites are always clamorous for secular enjoyments. As soon as one mode of pleasure becomes insipid, and ceases to delight, they resort to another, to fill up the vacuum which they feel within them.

Thus they are chained to the world, like the unhappy slave to the soil which he cultivates: they are contented with the servile yoke of Satan their

^d Psalm iv. 6—8.

^e 1 Gal. i. 4.

master, and pay a blind and cheerful obedience to his suggestions. Thus their whole time is consumed in gratifying the body, in foolishly decorating their persons, in frivolous conversation and amusements, in idle gossip and unnecessary visits, and in devising plans to kill time, and rob themselves of all the sweet consolations of the Gospel here, and the beatifying joys of heaven hereafter. Thus worldly people live and move in the giddy circles of folly and sinful dissipation, as if they had no souls capable of everlasting bliss or sorrow : they act as if there was no death to tear them away from the vain scenes which fascinate them ; as if there would be no day of reckoning hereafter, when they must answer for the manner in which they have behaved ; as if there was no hell, into which every trifling unprofitable servant will be cast^f ; and as if there was no state of happiness beyond the grave, to recompense the righteous for renouncing the world, the flesh, and the devil.

3. Such a careless sinful life is highly irrational: it degrades men infinitely below the station which they are designed to hold in the scale of being.

Even an Heathen moralist admonishes us, " that we were born for nobler ends, than to dissolve in pleasure, luxury, and gaiety, and to waste our time and talents in pursuing the contaminating amusements of the world."

Should we, then, who are enlightened by the bright rays of a Divine Revelation, esteem it a proof of a good understanding to debase our souls, and thus rank ourselves with the beasts that perish ? Is it any mark of true wisdom, to divest ourselves of the man, and play the brute, which is governed only by

^f Mat. xxv. 30.

its present feelings, and has no regard to futurity?

Shall we, then, account those persons wise, who are held in the most degrading bondage by carnal appetites and passions, and slight all the soberest dictates of reason and religion? No. Under whatever specious names they may disguise their conduct, it is foolish in the extreme; it is a sort of insanity, that, without a total and speedy reformation, must be followed by consequences fatal to the interests of their souls. It is the decision of God himself, that they who "live in pleasure, are dead whilst they live;" and that they "who are far from him, shall perish."

How can they be spiritually-minded, who have no love for God, but indulge in the very practices which he most clearly prohibits? How can they obtain salvation and grow in grace, whose thoughts are absorbed by the world? The language of inspiration declares that such persons "have their portion in this life," and therefore have nothing to expect beyond it.

4. Have you, O ye gay and trifling sinners! ever counted the cost? Have you fully considered the dreadful sacrifice which you must make, if you run the absurd rounds of worldly folly and vanity? Are you prepared to lose your souls, and doom them to endless sufferings, for the sake of "the pleasures of sin, which are but for a short season!" Stop! and ponder these questions thoroughly, before you deliberately choose what will occasion you to shed an abundance of unavailing tears.

The Scriptures persuade you, in the most forcible

^a 1 Tim. v. 6.

^b Psalm lxxiii. 27.

^{bb} ib. xvii. 13, 14.

^c Heb. xi. 25.

terms, to desist from a worldly and careless and unprofitable life: they affirm that such a course is incompatible with the regard which we owe to God; who claims the devoutest affection of the heart^u, and will not yield up his unalienable rights in favour of vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver^k. Will you, then, be enamoured with that which hates God, and manifests an utter dislike to his holy government? Hear, all ye who idolize the vanities of this transitory life, how the Word of Truth stigmatizes your conduct!—"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God^l."

Are you not afraid, then, to range yourselves on the side of the adversaries of the Lord? Will you dare to challenge His wrath, who "is able to destroy both body and soul in hell^m?"

Again; the Scripture solemnly advises you to seek a more substantial portion than those vain things which charm you; and which are as earthly in their origin, as they are transient and unsatisfying in their nature. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for everⁿ."

5. Are you one of those inconsiderate persons who make this world their all, and who esteem its

^u Prov. xxiii. 26.

^k 1 Sam. xii. 21.

^l James iv. 4.

^m Mat. x. 28.

ⁿ 1 John ii. 15—18.

fleeting enjoyments as the best possession that can be obtained? Are you carnal in the prevailing desires of your mind, hankering after riches, fame, pleasure, and the applause of man, whilst you neglect the honour which cometh from God only? Do you live, as the generality do, buried in the cares or carried away by the vicious pleasures of this life? If so, you have cause to tremble at the denunciations of God's anger against you. It is certain you cannot dwell eternally with Him, unless you pursue a different course:—"For, if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live^o."

Begin, then, the work of repentance, without delay. Through the assistance of Divine grace, you will attain a thorough reformation: and this necessary aid to strengthen your endeavours will be granted, if you seek it earnestly.

It is, indeed, high time "to cast off the works of darkness, and to put on the armour of light^p."

A worldly spirit is as destructive of real happiness, as it is inconsistent with religion. Nor can you ever make any progress in righteousness, any advancement towards heaven, so long as you "follow the multitude to do evil." "Wherefore, in obedience to God's command, come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty^q."

^o Rom. viii. 13.

^p ib. xiii. 12.

^q 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

HELPS AND ASSISTANCES FOR THE ATTAINMENT
OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE.

LECTURE LXXI.

AN ACQUAINTANCE WITH, AND A CORDIAL BELIEF OF,
THE DOCTRINES CONTAINED IN THE OLD AND NEW
TESTAMENTS.

2 Tim. i. 13. *Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.*

THERE are some things, of which we may be safely ignorant, without any hazard or detriment to our souls. We may be destitute of an accurate knowledge of nature, and of the fixed and general laws by which the Almighty governs the universe. We may not have any correct idea of the magnitude and distance of the heavenly bodies, nor of the number of the stars. We may be incapable of understanding and explaining the mysterious connection which subsists between the body and the soul. With a thousand subjects of this kind we may not be conversant, and yet by no means endanger our everlasting welfare; for the inconvenience arising from a want of information concerning these matters is but temporary in its consequences, since it can only affect us in this imperfect state.

But ignorance of spiritual things is attended with the most lamentable effects. It is replete with danger both to soul and body. It is ruinous to our temporal and eternal happiness. We cannot die unacquainted with Christ, with redemption through his blood, with the pardon of our sins, and the renewing and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, without losing our souls, and being deprived of all the glory of heaven.

This consideration ought to make us anxious to

possess an experimental acquaintance with "God and his Son Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal^a." Should not, then, the knowledge of Christ by faith, as the way to celestial happiness, be our first concern? Should not every man resolve, that whatever else he forgets or neglects, he will "follow on to know the Lord^b?"

St. Paul valued such an acquaintance with his Saviour above the highest natural acquisitions. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ: yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ^c."

This saving acquaintance with the salvation that is in Jesus must be sought from the Scriptures, the grand fountain of Divine knowledge. With the great fundamental truths which they lay before us, you must endeavour to become more familiar every day. By reading, studying, and meditating on the Oracles of God, you will gradually acquire a knowledge of heavenly things. Through the assistance of the Holy Ghost, you will make a constant and uniform progress in Divine things: fresh light will break in upon your mind, to make your path clear, and to assist you in every difficulty.

And oh, how great a sum of happiness will the knowledge of God in Christ impart! It will afford you the most delightful peace and satisfaction. It will give you a joyful anticipation of future bliss: and, when this frail life is ended, it will put you in the undisturbed possession of it for ever.

1. But be it remembered, that a hearty and sincere

^a John xvii. 3.

^b Hos. vi. 3.

^c Phil. iii. 7—10.

belief of the doctrines which the Bible reveals, is a necessary step to the acquirement of that knowledge of Christ which bringeth salvation. Those Scriptural truths which have been treated on in the former part of the Work are indeed of the greatest moment to us all : they are a treasure of incomparable worth, which should be prized above thousands of gold and silver. God, who is the author of all good things, would not have published the Gospel to the world, had it not been especially adapted to promote its recovery from sin to righteousness, and from misery to lasting happiness : nor would the Holy Spirit have inspired men to write these Divine truths, if they could have been known by any other means. For these reasons, the peculiar doctrines of our holy religion claim the most cordial and unreserved belief.

2. Further, no other religious system which has appeared can make the least pretensions to a Revelation "worthy of all acceptance." The cruelty, obscenity, and absurdity of Heathen dogmas shew that no religion can boast of doctrines and precepts so just, holy, merciful, and good, as those which the Bible invites us to believe. Every other mode of faith, therefore, except that which the Scriptures furnish, ought to be rejected with abhorrence ; because it is highly affronting to God "to set at nought his counsel," and to follow the vain theories of uninspired men.

Nor must we countenance the fashionable, but destructive error, that one creed is as good as another ; and that it is no matter what opinions a man holds, if he be but sincere in maintaining them. This lax notion not only sanctions, but gives currency to the wildest fancies and the most dreadful here-

sies; whilst it takes off those moral restraints which are necessary to bridle the passions. For if men can but persuade themselves that any form of religion will be equally acceptable, to God, with that which He has appointed for our adoption, they will soon become indifferent to every kind of faith and worship, and relax into negligence and impiety and scepticism.

The Bible, whilst it prescribes an exclusive religion, does not give the least encouragement to such a latitude of opinion. It positively assures us, that "he who believeth not the Gospel of Christ, so as to frame his life according thereto, shall be damned"; "that there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but that of Christ"; and finally, that if we reject His atonement, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries".

3. Examine yourselves. Have you been accustomed to treat the peculiar doctrines of Christianity with infidel indifference, or with proud disdain? Have you indulged the impious thought, that those holy truths are superfluous, and that you will neither be better nor worse for what you believe? Then have you dishonoured God, and cast an unjust reflection upon His wisdom and goodness; as if, by making Christ known to us, as "the way, the truth, and the life," he had done what is unnecessary or useless.

How presumptuously wicked is it for guilty creatures thus to sit in judgment on God, and to censure his wise and merciful dispensations! As he will

* Mark xvi. 16.

† Heb. x. 26—30.

* Acts iv. 12.

† John xiv. 6.

punish the impenitent despisers of his grace with everlasting destruction, it is expedient for you to be humbled for your past contempt of his Gospel, and to pray, "Let my heart be sound in Thy statutes, that I be not ashamed¹."

4. The doctrines of Christ, then, must not be held as matters of speculation, which we are at liberty to treat with the same freedom as the idle conceits of fallible men: for it is not likely that our hearts and conduct will be much affected by any system of religious principles which we think we have authority to entertain or reject at our own discretion. Every thing unanswerably proves that we need a specific rule of faith to which we may conform, and a certain standard of morals by which our actions may be regulated, before our minds can be brought into that state of submission to the will of God on which our happiness in both worlds so much depends. They must, therefore, be received into the heart, and be sincerely embraced as articles of faith, if we desire "to pull down the strong-holds of sin and Satan, to cast down every towering imagination, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ¹."

"The word of God worketh effectually in all them that believe²." In whatever heart "the good seed is sown, and takes root, it brings forth fruit to perfection," producing love to God, and a constraining desire to walk agreeably to his directions. But when faith is not mixed with the Divine word, so as to incorporate it with the soul, no such effects attend it. We see no symptoms of true contrition, of love to God, of gratitude to Christ, and entire devotion to

¹ Psalm cxix. 80.

² 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

³ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

His service, where the awful verities of the Gospel are treated as speculative opinions ; but, on the contrary, all those fruits of impiety which naturally spring from a fallen undisciplined mind.

But, whether men know it or not, God has disclosed the sacred truths of the Bible for the most important purposes : first, that we may learn, from them, what we should believe ; and, secondly, what we should practise. The Gospel is designed “ for obedience to the faith, among all nations ¹.” They, who embrace it, and act conformably to its dictates, are and will be blessed : but they who disparage or undervalue or disobey it, are in a state of condemnation already ; and, unless the mercy of God interpose, they will become monuments of his wrath, through all eternity ¹. “ Blessed are they who hear the Word of God, and keep it. ^m!” “ Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, (that is, the Gospel, which liberates the soul from the bondage of sin and the malediction of the violated Law,) and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed ⁿ.”

5. Let it never be forgotten, that the doctrines of the Christian religion must be received as indispensably necessary to salvation. There is no Royal road to heaven—no privileged and convenient path to celestial glory, in which we can hope to be exempted from the trouble of “ taking up the cross of Christ, and following him in the regeneration^o.” “ Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it^p.” “ I am the way, the truth, and the life : no man cometh to the Father, but by me^q.”

^a Rom. i. 5. ¹ John iii. 36. ^m Luke xi. 28. ⁿ James i. 25.

^o Mat. xvi. 24. ^p ib. vii. 14. ^q John xiv. 6.

The knowledge of Christ does save all who attain it. Numbers in every age can attest that the grace of Jesus has illuminated, sanctified, and blessed them. Before their conversion, they were covered with darkness, laden with guilt, and oppressed with fear. But, on their reception of the Gospel, they became pious, devout, and happy.

Would you experience its saving power? Then admit the word of salvation into your heart. Submit to its gracious influence, that it may purify your affections, and fix them upon the heavenly Canaan, "where true joys are only to be found."

LECTURE LXXII.

THE CONSCIENTIOUS USE OF THE MEANS OF GRACE.

Ezekiel xxxvi. 37. Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be inquired of by the House of Israel, to do it for them.

God could, we are sure, accomplish his designs, and bestow spiritual blessings upon us, without the intervention of means and instruments. He created the world by his Sovereign fiat. "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast^a." "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth^b."

Such a display of Omnipotence might be expedient at first, to evince the uncontroled power of the Lord, and his independence of finite things and creatures: but now we see that Jehovah, in his general operations both in nature and grace, condescends to accomplish his purposes by the agency of means, to which he gives a fitness to answer some valuable end.

We may trace this wise appointment throughout

^a Psalm xxxiii. 9.

^b ib. v. 6.

all nature. The earth is warmed by the genial influence of the sun, and rendered fruitful by the refreshing shower. Day and night are occasioned by the rising and setting of the sun. The due circulation of the blood through the arteries and veins is the cause of continued life and health; whilst the vital fluid itself is produced and made fit for its purpose, by means of food digested in the stomach.

God acts in this manner to set us an example of industry in the use of means adapted to answer the proposed end. Perhaps he saw that, in our present imperfect state, we should not rightly esteem his mercies, if we could gain them without care and labour.

As matters now stand, the necessity of exerting ourselves to secure what will conduce to our well-being is productive of real benefit, by calling our faculties into exercise. We cannot obtain a blessing from God on our souls, without we have recourse to those very means which he has instituted, and which, we may rest assured, are founded in the most perfect wisdom: and they must be employed with sincerity and be persevered in, and prayer must be offered for the Divine blessing, to make them effectual.

1. Then use all the means of grace, with a sincere desire that they may be made profitable to your souls. In all transactions, "honesty is the best policy;" because it proceeds in a straight course to its object, and is always fraught with most real advantage. But deceit fears detection, because it is conscious of acting dishonestly.

Now, where can integrity be so necessary, as in our intercourse with the all-seeing God, who is acquainted with every design we entertain. It is not difficult, at times, to impose on our fellow-creatures, by a specious shew of piety; but to

deceive God, who knoweth the secrets of the heart, is utterly impossible. Hence we are cautioned against hypocrisy in all our approaches with the Lord, as that grievous sin which will be finally exposed, and treated with the punishment it deserves. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap^c."

When, therefore, you present your supplications to God for mercy to blot out your sins, and for grace to renew and purify your hearts from vain and unholy imaginations; when you pray that he would enable you, by the assistance of his Sacred Spirit, to put in practice the good resolutions which you have formed, and preserve you from the temptations of the world; be sincere in these applications to God; and let the words of your mouth be the genuine feelings of your breast^e.

A deep sense of your spiritual wants will teach you the value of the means, and the expediency of using them with a special reference to the proposed end. The grand object which you profess to be seeking, namely, the salvation of your souls, should be ever kept in sight. You will never, like the insincere formalist, be unconcerned whether your endeavours to obtain the blessing succeed or not. An answer to your fervent petitions will be looked for with the greatest solicitude^d.

2. Let the ordinances of religion be constantly and diligently observed. Religious habits are not acquired in a day. It is a work of much time to root out of the heart those bitter weeds which have been growing ever since we were born. The means, therefore, which God has appointed for eradicating evil lusts and affections, and for implanting righteous

^c Gal. vi. 7.

^e Psalm xix. 14.

^d ib. cxxx. 5, 6.

dispositions in the soul, must be tried with patience and persisted in; until it shall please Him to crown them with the desired success. "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage; and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord*."

There is nothing truly excellent, in nature or art, which is the product of a moment. Almost every thing that is destined for great usefulness, is slow in its beginnings, and sure in its progress towards perfection.

So it happens, generally speaking, in the kingdom of grace. The heart is, for the most part, gradually enlightened with the knowledge of God, until it emerges "out of darkness into marvellous light." "The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard-seed, which, when it is sown, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: but, when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs; and shooteth out great branches, so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it!"

You will not desist, then, from perusing the Scriptures, nor from hearing sermons, nor from any religious exercise, because the spiritual good which you are seeking is delayed for the trial of your faith; but this delay will only increase your importunity; and cause you to say, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me!" By this holy perseverance in supplication, the Canaanitish woman prevailed with Christ^b; and by the same holy earnestness the blind man recovered his sight^c. If you sue for pardon and salvation in a similar spirit of faith, you will most assuredly obtain "the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of your salvation." "I

* Psalm xxvii. 14. ^f Mark iv. 30—33. ^g Gen. xxxii. 24—30.

^b Mat. xv. 22—29. ^c Luke xiii. 35—43.

said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me, in vain^k."

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you^l."

3. The means of grace should be used in faith. We should not make it a question whether they are efficacious, and adapted to answer the end for which they are designed, or not. It is affronting to God to despise or undervalue those "wells of salvation" which he hath opened unto us; and to say with disdain, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?" Let the preaching of the word, and all the means of grace, be regarded as Divine appointments, which He will honour and bless; for "So (saith the Lord) shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent itⁿ."

4. They must be used in dependence on the promise of God to make them effectual. "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord^o," is the gracious assurance given to every one who seeks salvation in the name of Christ. But the means cannot ensure the end, without the blessing of God upon the use of them. The exertion of ploughing and sowing will not produce a crop, if the sun and rain are withheld, which are requisite to bring the seed sown to perfection. In like manner, we must look up to God for his assistance; for without the quickening energy of the Holy Ghost, no means will ever succeed in converting the soul of man, and making it productive of every good word and work.

^k Isa. xlv. 19.

^l Mat. vii. 7, 8.

ⁿ 2 Kings v. 1—14.

^o Isa. lv. 11.

^p Hosea vi. 3.

The Christian is taught to exert himself most diligently ; but, after all, to depend on Divine aid for crowning his exertions with success. “ Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling ; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do, of his good pleasure^p. ”

Seriously invoke, then, the influence of the Spirit, to seal the instructions of his word on your heart ; in order “ that the means of grace may afford you the hope of glory. ”

5. When the ordinances of religion are used in the spirit we have recommended, they will certainly conduce to the desired end ; because they are the appointed channels through which God conveys his grace to them that truly seek him.

Agreeably to his own declaration, we must expect his blessing in this very way. “ A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you ; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh^q. ” Yet, at the same time, to stimulate us to a holy activity in the use of means, God suspends the grant of this unmerited favour, upon our compliance with his command to be diligent in the pursuit of the promised salvation :—“ For all this will I be inquired of, to do it for them^r. ”

How presumptuous, then, is it to dream of heaven, without using the efforts which are needful to obtain it ! Can the husbandman reap where he has not sown ? Can we succeed in any of our worldly concerns, without thought, and labour, and patience ? Now, although men admit these self-evident maxims as being applicable to the business of life, yet they practically deny them in religion, and generally

^p Phil. ii. 12, 13. ^q Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. ^r ib. v. 37.

concur in neglecting the means which ought to be used for their salvation; as if the unspeakable blessing could be secured without any difficulty.

This, however, is a sad infatuation, which cannot fail to destroy us, if it be rested in; for the Lord will give his blessing to those only who do his will, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me." "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my door."

* Prov. viii. 17.

* ib. viii. 34. John vii. 17.

LECTURE LXXIII.

ON THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH.

Exod. xx. 8. *Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy.*

AFTER Adam was created, God saw fit to determine that a portion of his time should be solely occupied in His service; and that the rest should be allowed him for the management of his secular affairs. That part of our time which God claims for the worship of Himself, is one day out of seven; which is to be exclusively devoted to the glory of His name.

But it must not be forgotten, that Jehovah expects us to find leisure every day for those religious exercises, which tend to honour Him, and promote the health of our souls. Our bodies stand in need of constant aliment, to keep them alive: and will not our souls famish, if they are not regularly sustained by Christ, who is "the bread of life which came down from heaven?"

To nourish our immortal souls, and to prevent us

* John vi. 32—36.

from being so much absorbed with worldly cares, as to overlook our spiritual interests, God has wisely instituted one particular day, for commemorating the creation of the world, and for receiving the religious homage and grateful praises and thanksgivings of his intelligent creatures.

We have an account of the institution of the Sabbath, and the reason assigned for it, in the second chapter of Genesis:—"And on the seventh day, God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it he had rested from all his work which God had created and made^b."

A due regard to the Sabbath was enjoined upon the Jewish Nation, after their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, in language which implied that the command to hallow it had not been unknown to them before:—"Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy^c."

That this command, however, was not restricted in its application to the Israelites, but is of universal obligation, extending to all nations and every individual on earth, is obvious, from the use of the second person, which is prefixed to this as well as the rest of the Ten Commandments. It will be expedient to shew how the Sabbath may be profaned, and in what the due observance of it consists.

1. Every kind of servile work and labour is incompatible with a proper respect to this day of sacred repose, on which God absolutely prohibits us from doing any thing which ought to be done at another time. "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of

^b Gen. ii. 2, 3.

^c Exod. xx. 8.

the Lord thy God : in it thou shalt not do any work ; thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates^d."

2. Every description of pleasure, amusement, diversion, and sensual indulgence, should be studiously avoided ; because it is not only contrary to the Divine injunction, but produces a levity of spirit which does not comport with that sobriety of thought, and gravity of manners, which a day set apart to the worship of God demands.

Furthermore ; excursions, idle visits, and entertainments ; vain, trifling, or unprofitable conversation ; reading of books which are not of a religious tendency ; writing of letters on business, or making of bargains and contracts ; are sinful breaches of the Divine law.

How little does the profane conduct of multitudes accord with the requirements of God's command, to "remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy!" This sacred day is dishonoured, in the most open and shameful manner, by millions who call themselves Christians, but who, in this respect, are worse than unenlightened Pagans. The total absence of some from the house of God, and the partial attendance of others ; the unholy conversation and practices of many, who on Sundays indulge themselves in luxury and evil company, and hunt after carnal diversions to beguile away the tediousness of these holy solemnities ; are gross affronts offered to God, who will hereafter avenge them on impenitent transgressors.

Have not you thus desecrated and abused the Lord's Day ? Reflect on the guilt of such violations of his high command. Beseech him to pardon your

^d Exod.xx. 9, 10.

offences; and pray that in future you may reverence the Sabbath, by devoting it, as a holy day, to God, as well as a season of grace and improvement to your souls.

3. The right observance of the Sabbath requires not only a cessation from all labour, but, as the term implies, a state of entire rest in the service and worship of God. The whole of our time, on this sacred day, ought to be occupied in devotional exercises; except those intervals of it which are employed in works of necessity for ourselves, or in acts of charity and mercy to others.

4. A uniformly regular attendance on the public ordinances of God's house cannot be dispensed with, in those who are at all concerned to honour him, and promote their own salvation. When we are in his sanctuary, a holy awe and reverence should characterize our conduct. With the hearing and reading of his word, and with due meditation thereon, we should join in sincerely praying for the blessing of Heaven on our souls.

After Divine worship is ended, we should remove to our closets; and then, reflecting on the truths we have heard, should enter into the examination of our souls, to see what profit we have derived from the solemn transactions in which we have been engaged. Nor ought we to forget to entreat the Spirit of the Lord to water the seed sown, and make it take deep root, and produce abundantly the fruits of righteousness, to His glory.

The intermediate hours, which are not taken up in public worship, should be profitably employed in a careful perusal of the word of God, and prayer for Divine teaching to understand it.

A portion of this sacred interval should be spent in

the family circle, in instructing our children and servants, and in instilling into their minds the knowledge of God. Meditation on the glory and happiness of heaven, conversation about the salvation of the soul through faith in Christ, will furnish important subjects for discourse on the Sabbath, with those who are more immediately committed to our care, as parents and masters.

5. Now, a Sabbath thus religiously spent brings more real comfort with it, to a pious mind, than any gratification to be reaped from carnal enjoyments. And were our souls truly spiritualized and enlightened by Divine grace, we should esteem such a mode of employing these holy seasons a high privilege, and every objection urged against it as an indication of a worldly mind which is at enmity with God. "One day," said the Royal Psalmist, "spent in thy courts, is better than a thousand elsewhere. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness*."

6. The institution of the Sabbath is confessedly a great benefit to all classes of the community. The morals, health, and happiness of nations are so much ameliorated by its due observance, that even unbelievers, who question its obligation, will readily admit its utility. Indeed, were it not for the general knowledge which is diffused by religious instruction, and the salutary restraints imposed by this sacred day of rest, we should have few, if any, traces of genuine piety left amongst us; but should most probably, in a short time, degenerate into a state of barbarism and spiritual ignorance.

The neglect of the Sabbath is the fruitful cause of that profligacy and dissipation and irreligion which

* Psalm lxxxiv. 10.

too much prevail in the higher classes of society, and the prolific source of those vices which are found among the lower. Many of those unfortunate culprits who annually forfeit their lives to the justice of their injured country, avow, on the scaffold, that they were easily led into the commission of those offences which have ended in an ignominious death, by a disregard to the duties of the Lord's Day.

7. All, then, who value their souls will dread the guilt of Sabbath-breaking, whereby they provoke God, and become an easy prey to every temptation. Listen not to the invitations of those who would seduce you into this act of rebellion against the King of Heaven; to whose righteous law and government you ought to live in dutiful subjection. "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not;" neither be partakers of their evil deeds.

All those who wish to promote the good of society will venerate this holy day; and endeavour to prevail on others, both by argument and example, to do the same: ever remembering, that civil order and subordination on the one hand, and the cause of morality and religion on the other, will prevail, in a kingdom, in exact proportion as the worship and fear of God are kept up amongst the people who compose it.

Parents, masters, and guardians, frequent the house of God on the Sabbath; and enforce, by Christian persuasion and authority¹, the attendance of your children, servants, dependants, and all over whom you have any influence. Do not suffer them to spend any part of this sacred day in diversions, or with wicked companions; but take care to exhibit the blessed effects of piety in your own lives, that

¹ Prov. i. 10, 16.

² Gen xviii. 19.

they also may be excited to seek the blessings of the Gospel, for an everlasting possession. "Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord¹." Recollect you are responsible, in a high degree, for the misconduct of those whom God has confided to your care. If they should become unrighteous for want of proper instruction and a good example, they will perish, "but their blood will be required at your hands¹." A consideration of the curse which will fall on the heads of those who have been negligent in their duty to their tender offspring and servants, and of the blessing which will come upon those parents who have honoured God by a religious life, will equally prompt you to use the utmost diligence in teaching all, under your immediate charge, the fear of the Lord; that, having served Him together on earth, you may mutually rejoice in His presence and favour in heaven.

The following remarks on the good which may be derived from the proper observation of the Sabbath, by Sir Matthew Hale, who was one of the most enlightened judges that ever sat on the English Bench, are worthy of the most serious attention. "I have, by long and sound experience, found that the due observance of this day, and of the duties of it, has been of singular comfort and advantage to me. The observance of this day hath ever had joined to it a blessing on the rest of my time; and the week that hath been so begun hath been blessed and prospered to me: and, on the other side, when I have been negligent of the duties of this day, the rest of the week has been unsuccessful, and unhappy, as to my own secular employments; so that I could easily make an estimate of my successes in my own

¹ Eph. vi. 4.

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 6.

secular employments the week following, by the manner of my passing this day : and this I do not say slightly, or inconsiderately, but upon a long and sound observation and experience."

Nor is this account at all incredible, when it is considered that the Sabbath is a means of grace, in which God often smiles on the souls of his people, who are refreshed with the abundance of peace, whilst they "draw water out of the wells of Salvation".

The promises of the Lord warrant us to expect that he will bestow tokens of his regard on those who honour His holy day. "To every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant ; even unto him will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and daughters : I will give him an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off^k."

^h Isa. xii. 3.

^k ib. lvi. 3—8.

LECTURE LXXIV.

READING THE SCRIPTURES.

John v. 39. *Search the Scriptures : for in them ye think ye have eternal life : and they are they which testify of me.*

If God, from commiseration to our ruined condition, and from a desire to do what was expedient to make us happy, has vouchsafed the inestimable gift of his Holy Word, it is a duty incumbent on us to search, examine, and weigh its contents.

No consideration is wanting to enforce upon us a devout regard to the Scriptures. They are "given by inspiration of God : " and shall He speak to us about our salvation, and we refuse to listen to his gracious words ? Is there nothing in a proclamation from

Heaven, to rebels who have made themselves obnoxious to His wrath, to engage their attention? Are we in danger every moment of mistaking our path, and destroying our souls; and can we coolly refuse a guide, who offers to conduct us safely through this troublesome world, to a land of everlasting rest and peace? Has the redemption of Christ, which is a theme so big with wonder that "angels desire to look into it," no power to attract our hearts? Surely, if we do not rightly esteem so invaluable a treasure, we not only affront God, but manifest a stupid unconcern about our eternal welfare,—an indifference which, in the end, will prove fatal to us, if we persist in it. •

The diligent perusal and study of the Scriptures is strongly inculcated by God himself. "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children: and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up^a."

All the Sacred Penmen exhort us to meditate frequently upon the Word of God. "Search the Scriptures^b," was the command of Christ; who, as well as his Apostles, constantly appealed to the Divine Oracles, supposing their hearers were acquainted with them. In the same manner, Ministers, in their public addresses, appeal to Scripture in support of the doctrines which they teach.

How, then, can their auditors be competent judges of the force of their arguments, unless they have some knowledge of the Bible? I shall, therefore, give some brief directions for performing this duty with advantage.

^a Deut. vi. 6—10.

^b John v. 39.

1. Search the whole of the Scriptures contained in the Old and New Testaments, that you may see their design and tendency. Every part of the sacred volume should be accurately examined, in order that its relation to the rest may be better understood.

It may be admitted, without undervaluing their just authority, that all the truths revealed in the Bible are not equally important; yet every thing which it contains has its special use, and is by no means unnecessary or unimportant. We may safely bestow less attention on those portions of Holy Writ which contain no doctrine of moment: yet the whole, as being the word of God, is entitled to a proportionate share of serious consideration; for one part throws light upon another; and therefore we cannot discern the coincidence and harmony of the Scriptures, unless we have a suitable acquaintance with the whole of them.

It would greatly facilitate our acquiring a general knowledge of the Bible, to assign separate portions of time for reading it. The Old Testament may be perused in the morning, and the New in the evening. When the whole is read, by the help of marginal references one passage may be compared with another, and thus the mutual dependence of the several parts on each other will be more distinctly seen. The New Testament will appear as a valuable clue to unravel the intricacies of the Old: and the important lessons which they both teach will appear to rest on the same common "foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone."

By such a method as is here proposed, a person

Eph. ii. 20-22.

may become familiarly acquainted with the Scriptures in a few years : and, whilst the plan suggested of reading through the Bible will prove highly beneficial to parents and masters, it will be found profitable to children and servants, who will thereby obtain a comprehensive view of the religion of the Gospel, and be prepared for reaping every benefit from the public instructions of God's house.

2- Read the Bible every day ; and not, as some do, merely on particular occasions, or, at most, on the Lord's Day, when their attention is more especially invited to it ; but regularly, and at stated periods.

The Word of God is the food and nourishment of the soul, which requires constant support as well as the body. If, therefore, the mind be not frequently supplied with heavenly aliment, it will be filled with those vain thoughts which will only pollute and destroy it^d.

In the morning, some leisure moments should be spared to inspect the Scriptures. And again, in the evening, when you retire from the bustle and labours of the day, the perusal of the Divine Word should be resumed.

The most striking texts and portions of it should be committed to memory, that they may direct our path, and instruct us how to discharge every duty.

Many advantages may be expected to result from this practice: you will thereby furnish yourselves with the strongest motives to a holy, discreet, useful, and happy life. When your minds are enlarged by an acquaintance with Sacred Writ, you will acquire the most valuable knowledge, applicable to the various

^d Gen. vi. 5. John vi. 63. Psalm xix. 10, 11.

relations which you sustain ; and thus you will be qualified to become a blessing to all around you, whilst you will be made wise unto salvation.

Let every one, then, regard that day as shamefully misspent, in which some portion of the Scriptures has not been read. Consider every excuse for neglecting to read them, where it can be done, as trifling and of no avail ; affronting to God, whose goodness is thereby despised ; and injurious to the interests of your souls, which are overlooked, perhaps, for the gratification arising from some worthless or sensual pursuit.

But, as in other religious duties, so in reading the Bible, it is important to pay attention to the spirit in which it is performed. For want of duly observing this caution, many hear and read the Oracles of God without any benefit whatever to their souls*.

3. In order to make this sacred study more generally profitable, peruse the Bible with a teachable disposition. Lay aside every prejudice against it, which you have imbibed from infidel books or companions ; for, until these are removed, they will prove a serious obstruction to your advancement in Divine knowledge.

If you meet with a difficulty in the Scriptures, which you cannot solve, instead of cavilling at it as an absurdity, because it is above your comprehension, rather wait for clearer light ; supposing it to be much more probable that you are mistaken, than the All-wise God, whose word is unalterably true.

Come to this fountain of light, not with preconceived opinions, but with a disposition to learn from it what you must do to be saved. Say, with Elihu, "That which I see not, teach thou me." And thus

* Heb. iv. 2.

† Job xxxiv. 32.

wisdom will be communicated from above, which will enable you to understand "the things that make for your peace."

4. Read the Scriptures with meditation on their contents. It is highly irreverent to turn over the pages of the Bible as you would those of an ordinary book; because "it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter^{ff}."

There is something in every chapter deserving of notice. When you come to a passage in which some important truth is inculcated, you should note it, and endeavour, by holy meditation, to extract therefrom the particular instruction which it is designed to convey^g.

5. Search the Scriptures, with prayer for the Divine blessing, to enable you to discover their spiritual meaning. We must expect, in a Revelation from God, that there would be some things hard to be understood^{gg}. These difficult passages are intended for the exercise of our faith and patience, and, above all, to teach us the necessity of Divine illumination, "that the eyes of our understanding being enlightened by the Spirit of the Lord, we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the Saints^h."

"He alone, who inspired the Scriptures, can help us to understand them: and if we read them in dependence on, and prayer for, his teaching, he will lead us into all truth, as far as our safety, peace, and duty may require it."

6. Read the Bible for the express purpose of learning from it the will of God, and reducing it to

^{ff} Locke. ^g Heb. ii. 1—4. ^{gg} 2 Pet. iii. 16—18.

^h Eph. i. 18—20.

practice. The Scriptures disclose a system of heavenly truth, which is intended "to make us wise unto salvation." This, it must be our aim, by diligent searching, to find out. Leaving the perverse disputations of fallible men, we ought to inquire, What does God enjoin us to believe and do?

You must be prepared to hearken, and to bow with reverence to the decisions of God's word, however contrary they may be to your former opinions, or to those of others who are reputed for their wisdom.

We ought to respect the authority of God, who speaks to us in his word; and not to doubt the truth of any thing he has revealed; but to study its meaning with patience.

"We should search the Scriptures, as the navigator consults his chart, and makes his observations, that he may discover where he is, and what course he must steer;—or as any one looks into a glass, that he may both know what manner of man he is, and learn to adjust what is unbecoming;—or as an heir reads his Father's will, that he may ascertain what the inheritance is, and the nature of the tenure by which he must possess it."

And the very moment you have fair ground to conclude that you have discovered the will of God, you must cheerfully obey his instructions. No loss of worldly esteem, or preferment, should bribe you to offer violence to your just convictions; nor should any sacrifice, however painful, be declined, to avoid the consequences that may ensue a profession of faith in Christ. To fortify us against the fear of reproach, and to make us courageous in defence of His cause, our Divine Master gives us this solemn admonition: "Whosoever shall confess me before

men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny before my Father, which is in heaven¹."

Finally, if we thus seek to know our duty, and study to perform it,—if we thirst after the salvation of Christ, and strive to obtain it,—then shall we imbibe true wisdom from the perusal of the Bible, and arrive at the knowledge of the truth, as it is in Jesus : for "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works²."

¹ Mat. x. 32, 33.

² 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

LECTURE LXXV.

ON PRAYER.

Colossians iv. 2. *Continue in prayer ; and watch in the same, with thanksgiving.*

"God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him^a." "Holiness becometh his house for ever^b." It is, therefore, a duty incumbent on us to choose the best means of testifying our esteem for Him, before whom angels reverently cover their faces.

Prayer is an essential act of Divine worship ; and, when rightly performed, it is pleasing to the Lord^c ; it is an immediate address to him, in which we lay open the secrets of our hearts, and invoke his gracious assistance, to guard us from the perils which

^a Psalm lxxxix. 7.

^b ib. xciii. 5.

^c ib. l. 23.

surround us, to confirm us in the possession of any good we enjoy, or to confer something upon us which is requisite to our comfort and salvation.

Prayer, then, may be defined, An address to Almighty God; in which we supplicate some blessing that he has to bestow, or deprecate those evils which he is able to avert from us. It always implies a sense of our personal guilt, misery, wants, and impotency; and a firm confidence, not only in God's power, but also in His willingness to afford us the help we stand in need of. Unless we approach the Throne of Grace with these convictions, our petitions can never reach up to heaven, nor bring down from thence the blessings which we implore; much less will they be accepted of God, who is displeased with "the sacrifice of fools."

Prayer is of two kinds; and is either oral—by words expressive of our desires; or internal and silent, where the heart is engaged in fervent breathings and aspirations after spiritual mercies.

Whether we draw nigh unto God vocally, by using words; or inwardly, "by groans and sighs, which cannot be uttered;" we must take care to let our souls be absorbed in this act of devotion; otherwise it will be a mock service, which God abhors. Of all who deal insincerely and hypocritically in this matter, Jehovah asserts, "This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

When, therefore, we call upon the Lord in public or private, let the words of our mouth bespeak the feelings and sentiments of our hearts. And when we silently invoke his grace, oh may our aspirations proceed from the very bottom of our souls, that they may arrest the attention of God, and return

* Rom. viii. 26.

* Mark vii. 6.

back laden with the blessings of which we stand in need!

There is a third kind of prayer, which is called ejaculatory; in which the supplicant sends up fervent petitions to God. Thus David, when Absalom conspired against his throne, and was joined in the revolt by the king's privy counsellor, prayed, "Oh Lord, I beseech thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!" The success which attended this short petition is a direct encouragement of the practice of lifting up the heart to heaven in pious ejaculations.

It is of great consequence to understand for what we ought to pray; for, if we err upon this point, we shall be in danger of mistaking the obvious design of prayer, which, when rightly conducted, is fraught with so much profit to our souls.

1. We are not allowed either to covet, or to pray for, an abundance of temporal good things; but we are directed to be satisfied with that measure of them which God sees fit to vouchsafe, as sufficient for the supply of our necessities. We are not to hanker after riches, or any thing which Providence, for wise reasons, denies us. Many would certainly be ruined, if they were to obtain the things which they ask for. We know not how, or what to pray for, until we are enlightened by the Holy Ghost^{ff} to discover our real wants, and the source from whence they are to be supplied. A conviction of our ignorance in this respect, should teach us to say, as the Disciples of Jesus did, "Lord, teach us how to pray^g!"

Christ, in the excellent and comprehensive Form of Prayer which he has taught us, directs us, after praying

^f 2 Sam. xv. 31.

^g Rom. viii. 26.

^h Luke xi. 1.

for our daily bread, principally to supplicate spiritual blessings. Out of seven petitions of which it consists, there is but one for worldly things; and the rest are for heavenly benefits, adapted to promote the glory of God, and the happiness of our souls.

2. Pardon of our numerous sins, whether of omission or commission, of presumption or ignorance, of knowledge or deliberation; the aid of the Spirit to regenerate and dedicate our souls to the service of God; continual strength from heaven, that we may not be overcome by temptation, "nor draw back to perdition^b;" grace that we may "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure^c;" — these are the leading mercies we should solicit from God; the possession of which will make us wiser, holier, and happier, than the most splendid good which the world can confer.

Heavenly gifts and graces, then, should occupy the chief place in our petitions; because the happiness of our souls is of infinitely more consequence than any short-lived advantages we are able to procure for our bodies.

Now God declares his readiness to grant these blessings to those who seek them in a proper manner. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering^d."

Let us inquire how we frame our petitions. Is it for riches we pray, that by their assistance we may be enabled to gratify our love of the world, its pleasures and enjoyments, even as others? Do you entreat of God that you may be great, rather than good? Do you wish to figure in the world, rather

^b Heb. x. 39. ^c Psalm ii. 1—11. ^d James i. 5—9.

than submit to the state and condition in which he has fixed you? Then, St. James reproves your ambitious secular spirit, by affirming, "that you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts¹;" and, of course, such prayers are offensive to God, who knoweth our hearts.

Which interest, then, ought we to be most anxious about, that which will expire at death, or that which is to last for ever? Our reason and self-love should incline us to forego any temporal object, in order that we may advance the everlasting welfare of our souls.

3. If it be asked—For whom should we pray; the answer is obvious; for all ranks and conditions of men, from the peasant to the stately monarch: for as all are partakers of the same nature with ourselves, and are alike sinners with us, subject to similar temptations, wants, and sorrows,—and are candidates for the same heaven or hell,—it is agreeable to the law of universal charity, that we should seek the happiness of all our species, by imploring for them the beatitude of the heavenly world. "I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, giving of thanks, be made for all men—for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in, all godliness and honesty^m."

4. Nor is it less necessary that we should present our petitions to the Throne of Grace in a becoming temper of mind. When we approach that glorious Being "before whom the heavens and the earth flee awayⁿ," we should come into his sight with a deep sense of his holiness and our own sinfulness; with a just view of his greatness, and our own insignifi-

¹ James iv. 3.

^m 1 Tim. ii. 1—4.

ⁿ Rev. xx. 11.

cancy and worthlessness: and a consideration of the infinite distance which there is betwixt us, should produce a feeling of humility for our sins, and godly awe and veneration for his Divine Majesty. In our addresses to God, whilst we carefully avoid all unbecoming freedom, we should use the utmost respect, both in our posture and words. "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the House of God; and be more ready to hear, than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil^o."

5. With regard to the manner of offering up our prayers,—they should be presented in sincerity. The language of our mouths must accord with the feelings of our hearts: for the Lord is a God of judgment, and nothing feigned or insincere can pass as true with him. His eye can penetrate the thickest vail of hypocrisy, and detect every sinister thought and purpose of the wicked^p.

Let us not entertain iniquity in our hearts, lest God should shut his ears against our prayers^q. But if we call upon him faithfully, he will listen to our cry, and "give us his blessing, and life for evermore."

6. Prayer must be fervent, in order to be of any avail with God. So long as we are insensible of our wants, and indifferent about spiritual things, our petitions for mercy will be cold and heartless. But the moment we perceive our danger, the discovery will give an earnestness to our supplications for pardon and salvation, which will shew the estimation in which they are held. Let a man be fully sensible of his lost situation, and he will importunately cry, "Lord, save, or I perish!"

^o Eccles. v. 1.

^q Psalm lxi. 18.

^p Heb. iv. 13.

^r Matt. viii. 25.

Now, God loves to be thus entreated by us: nor have we reason to fear lest we should exhaust his patience; "for he is God, and not man^a." "Let us, therefore, come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need^b." The saints of old times prevailed with God by such holy importunity. And the Scripture encourages the trial of it, by assuring us that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much^c."

7. We must pray in faith, without which it is impossible to please God; "for he that cometh to him, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him^d." Unbelief, or distrust of God's ability and willingness to hear us, must, in the nature of things, spoil our prayers, and provoke his wrathful displeasure against us. How can we expect in such a state of mind to receive any thing from the Lord? Will he pour out his Holy Spirit on them that so signally dishonour him? Can he regard the faithless and unbelieving?

Honour the faithfulness of God, by confiding in his promise to hear the petitions of them that ask in his Son's name. Every assurance of grace and salvation is given to the sincere petitioner. "Whosoever shall call upon the Lord faithfully shall be saved^e."

8. As to the season of prayer;—it seems to have been a custom amongst good men in former ages of the Church, to offer up praises and thanksgivings to God at least three times a-day, but as much oftener as occasion required^f. "At evening, in the morning, and at noon, will I pray^g." Thus Daniel

^a Hos. xi. 9. ^b Heb. iv. 16. ^c James v. 16. ^d Heb. xi. 6.
^e Rom. x. 13. ^f Dan. vi. 10. ^g Psalm lv. 17. cxix. 164.

acted, in the face of the greatest danger ; dreading the displeasure of God, more than any evil which men could inflict.^b

It is desirable, then, that we should pray regularly at these appointed seasons ; otherwise, if we have no fixed hours for our devotion, there is danger lest we should soon be tempted to neglect the duty altogether.

But we ought not to confine the exercise of this Christian privilege to three times a-day. Many circumstances may occur to call for more frequent addresses to the Throne of Grace. In health and prosperity, as well as in sickness, adversity, temptation, affliction, and sorrow, we should often lift up our hearts to God, that he may relieve us from the distress which we suffer, or give us patience to bear it with Christian resignation ; and that he may bless us with every needful good, and preserve us from every injury.

9. The great utility of prayer cannot be questioned. In every age, earnest supplication has succeeded in drawing down the benediction of the Almighty.

Moses averted the anger of God from the Israelites by his powerful intercession in their behalf.^c

Hezekiah entreated the Lord to deliver his kingdom from the destruction with which it was menaced by the invasion of Sennacherib ; and his prayer was answered.^d

David has recorded the goodness of God, who frequently listened to his cry, and helped him.^e

Elijah prayed for rain to refresh the land from the ill effects of a long-continued drought, and God granted his request.^f

^b Dan. iii. 16—19.

^c Ex. x. 6—23.

^d 2 Kings xix. 20.

^e Ps. cxviii. 5—21.

^f James v. 17—19.

10. It is not to be expected, however, that prayer will induce God to alter his fixed determination, or prevail on him to bestow upon us whatever we choose to solicit : for if men could be sure of obtaining any thing which they thought proper to ask, some of them might seek after objects, the grant of which would be the greatest curse with which they could be visited.

God has wisely, therefore, set a limit to our petitions, beyond which it will be wrong for us to pass, in our approaches to him. “ And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us^a. ” All those spiritual mercies which relate to our comfort and salvation, such as forgiveness of sins, and a new heart, by which we are enabled to do the righteous will of God, may be supplicated with a rational expectation of our receiving them.

The encouragement held out to the performance of the duty is sufficiently strong to induce us to engage in it. Our Lord prompts us to it by a view of the superiority of God over earthly parents. “ If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him^b. ” “ Men ought, therefore, always to pray, and not to faint^c. ” The grant of every one of those benefits, which we need to render us everlastingly happy, is suspended on the condition of our being diligent in seeking them. “ For this will I be inquired of, to do it for them^d. ”

“ Ask, then, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

^a 1 John v. 14.

^c Luke xviii. 1.

^b Luke xi. 13.

^d Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

For every one that asketh, receiveth ; and he that seeketh, findeth ; and to every one that knocketh, it shall be opened¹."

Will not these assurances embolden you to come and spread your wants before the Lord ? What more can he do to draw us into his presence ? Shall he, then, solicit us in vain to be happy ? When He says, " Seek ye my face ;" let us reply, in sincerity, " Thy face, Lord, will we seek^m."

11. But, " to cast off fear, and to restrain prayer before Godⁿ," is the certain characteristic of an ungodly man, who sets the Lord at defiance, and is alike disregarding of his smile or his frown. And what will be the end of those who neglect prayer ? God avers, that upon such he will finally " pour out his indignation, and upon the families that have not called upon his name^o."

On the other hand, God is pleased with the devotions of his people, and plentifully showers his blessing upon them. " The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers^p." " Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him ; I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him ; I will be with him in trouble ; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation^q."

¹ Mat. vii. 7, 8.

^m Ps. xxvii. 8.

ⁿ Job xv. 4.

^o Jer. x. 25.

^p Ps. xxxiv. 15.

^q Ps. xci. 14—16.

ON THE NATURE AND ADVANTAGE OF THE
SACRAMENTS.

LECTURE LXXVI.

ON BAPTISM.

Rom. vi. 3, 4. *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

FROM the very infancy of the Christian Church, the two Divine Ordinances which Protestants account the only Sacraments have been generally designated by that name. The Latin word which is translated 'Sacrament' signifies an oath, which was usually taken by the soldiers of the Roman armies; by which they bound themselves to be true to their country and commanders. Hence the same term has been applied, with the strictest propriety, to Baptism and the Lord's Supper; as being two solemn engagements, into which all professed Christians enter, to live devoted to Christ, the Captain of their Salvation; under whose banners they promise "to fight manfully against sin, the world, and the devil; and to continue his faithful soldiers and servants unto the end of their lives^a."

The Sacraments exhibit Divine truths to our senses, and render them more familiar and intelligible to our minds by the outward signs and figures of water, bread, and wine; and the reception of grace and spiritual benefits is represented by significant actions. By Divine appointment, they become means of grace and acts of worship, honourable to God, and profitable to us; binding us to the performance of certain duties, which, if conscientiously discharged,

^a Public Baptism of Infants.

will be attended with the blessing of Almighty God upon our souls.

1. We are taught by our Lord to consider Baptism as the initiatory ordinance of Christianity. When he sent his Apostles and Disciples to convert the nations to "the obedience of faith," he directed them, by the application of water, "to baptize them, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost^b." This solemn rite was intended to be the door of admission into the visible Church, by imposing on the baptized person the Christian name; and by granting him the privilege of the appointed means of grace and salvation; through the right use of which, under the Divine blessing, he might really become a Child of God, walk agreeably to so high and holy a relation, and, finally, inherit his kingdom for ever.

Water, on account of its purifying effects and general usefulness, is constantly employed by the inspired writers as an emblem of the satisfying blessings of the Gospel, and especially of the enlivening, sanctifying, fertilizing, and consoling influences of the Holy Ghost^c.

The use of it was appointed in several of the rites and ceremonies of the Law, as well as in the preparatory baptism of John.

That holy and happy change which Christ denominates a "being born again," and which is essentially necessary to the felicity of mankind, is outwardly shadowed forth by the water of baptism, but can only be truly wrought on our souls by the effectual operation of the Spirit of God^d. Conformably to this view of the subject, Jehovah makes the following promise to the Children of Israel, which is to be

Mat. xxviii 19. ^c Isa xlv. 3, 4. lv. 1—4. ^d John iii. 5—9.

fulfilled at the period of their conversion: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness; and from all your idols will I cleanse you." That regeneration, or a new birth unto righteousness by the Holy Ghost, is the blessing which God engages to bestow upon them, seems evident, from the explanation given of the promise in the next verses:—"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them*."

Baptism, under the Gospel Covenant, corresponds; in its design, with Circumcision under the dispensation of the Law. "Baptism emphatically testifies the doctrine of original sin, and the necessity of regeneration; for it declares every man, "as born of the flesh," to be so polluted in heart, that, unless he be washed with purifying water, he cannot be received even into the outward Church of God; and unless he be inwardly cleansed by the Holy Ghost, he cannot be a member of the true Church. In this respect, it coincides with Circumcision, which implied, that without the mortification of the corrupt nature derived from fallen Adam, and the removal of that obstacle to the love and service of God, no man could be admitted into covenant with him†." And, like that ordinance, "it is the seal of the righteousness of faith:" for he, and he alone, who possesses the inward and spiritual grace which both Circumcision and Baptism outwardly denote, has a Divine attestation to the sincerity of his faith, and to the reality of his justification through the righteousness of the Redeemer.

2. This sacred ordinance is highly important, for

* Ezek. xxxvi. 25—28.

† Jer. iv. 4.

the following reasons. First, the very form of Baptism, "in (or into) the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," affords an irresistible argument for the doctrine of the Trinity; and was designed by our Lord to maintain the perpetual profession of it in his Church, that men in every age might be led to regard each of the Divine Persons as concurring in the merciful work of their salvation^a.

Secondly, Baptism is a special act of self-dedication, by which every baptized person openly avows, in the face of the whole world, that he is a worshipper and servant of God in Trinity; that he tacitly acknowledges that he is a sinner, needing forgiveness, and the new birth unto righteousness; that he relies on the mercy of the Father, on the death and intercession of Christ, and on the grace of the Holy Spirit, for salvation; and, consequently, that he sincerely purposes to forsake every sin and hurtful lust, and to live in dutiful obedience to God, the remainder of his days. Surely, then, all who thus devote themselves to God should feel a holy anxiety to fulfil the duties which their baptismal covenant imposes, that they may be numbered with the righteous, and have their last end like His^b.

Thirdly, the administration of Infant Baptism is of considerable use, in giving to great multitudes some ideas of the leading doctrines of the Christian Religion, especially of original sin, regeneration, sanctification, and the Trinity. The knowledge of these truths is, in some degree, as necessary to the right worship of God, as to the obtaining salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. Let parents, therefore, honour this Divine appointment, by bring-

^a 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

^b Numbers xxiii. 10.

ing their infant offspring to the font to be baptized; and to be solemnly set apart to the service of the Lord. Let them earnestly pray for their children, that they may become new creatures by regenerating grace; and that, through their instructions and example, they may be brought up, and continue stedfast, in the faith and practice of the Gospel.

It is of great advantage to be thus early admitted into the visible Church, and trained up as her professing sons; because it entitles the baptized to the privilege of holy ordinances, which are made to the faithful the means of spiritual nourishment, and growth in devout affections.

3. But peculiar blessings may be expected to accrue to those "who rightly and by faith" receive the ordinance of baptism. In answer to the devout prayers of parents and believing friends, the Spirit of God may, in some particular cases, regenerate the soul of the infant, even at the hour of baptism. At that season the child may be separated to God as a chosen vessel; and, by the infusion of His grace, be enabled to glorify him through all the subsequent stages of his earthly existence. To suppose the impossibility of such cases, is to limit the power of the Holy Ghost, and to deny the utility of that sacrament which Christ himself has instituted.

4. But, when baptism is not rightly received, in faith, no such benefits can result from its administration. For, although a blessing is supposed, in some special instances, to follow the proper use and observance of the sacred rite, yet this admission does not oblige us to confound the outward sign with the inward and spiritual grace, or to imagine, with the members of the Romish Church, that the Sacraments produce a necessary effect by their own energy.

Whether water, the mere sign in baptism, is made the medium of actually conveying to the baptized person those spiritual benefits of the new birth which are represented by it, depends as much on the blessing of God to render the ordinance effectual, as on the temper in which it is approached. As the abuse, or improper use, of the ordinary means of grace which God has appointed for our salvation, such as, reading and hearing the Divine Word, and prayer, hinders their beneficial effect, yea, renders them injurious to those who misemploy them¹; so a spiritual blessing may, on the same ground, be justly withheld from all who approach God in this ordinance in a worldly and unbelieving spirit, or act unworthily with regard to the solemn engagements into which they then enter.

Can they who come to the holy rite of baptism without a due consideration of the obligations which it involves, without serious prayer for grace, without faith and penitence and love, which are dispositions so essential to their acceptance with God, complain, if their children be sent empty away, without receiving the blessing of the Lord, which he restricts to them that obey him? It is incumbent, then, on parents and sponsors, at the time of baptism, to devote their offspring to God by sincere prayer, and to come to the holy institution in that state of mind which God approves; and, afterwards, to take especial care, by their instructions, "to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Thus might this Divine ordinance, which is now so often abused, more frequently become the means of spiritual life, and happiness to the unholy offspring of Adam.

5. Those who have broken the solemn covenant:

¹ Matt. xiii. 18—23. 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

made with Christ in baptism, should deeply abase themselves on account of the high degree of guilt which they have incurred. It is no slight offence thus to dishonour Christ, to whom you have sworn allegiance. As the King punishes a deserter, or the General disgraces a coward who flies from the face of the enemy, so will Christ, hereafter, inflict the heaviest punishment on those who forsake his standard, to fight under the banners of his avowed foes¹. You, O faithless, irreligious souls! have committed this great crime against the Majesty of Heaven. You have wantonly torn the cross from your forehead, and trodden it under your feet. Instead of fulfilling the engagements into which you entered at your baptism, you have left the service of Christ, abjured his righteous cause, and have joined with Satan in opposing the interests of his kingdom¹. The least reparation you can make to your offended Lord, is to repent in dust and ashes, to reproach your ingratitude and treason, and to resolve, that, if spared, you will in future consecrate yourselves to the glory of the Most High. Yet make not this resolution in your own strength; because you have no power to withstand temptation, or to persevere in well-doing, without the grace of God assisting you. Would you be faithful unto death, and receive the crown of righteousness which fadeth not away; then you must seek that grace of Christ which is sufficient to enable you to overcome the world, and manifest a decided attachment to your Saviour. Then, He will forget your past unkindness in forsaking him; and recompense your fidelity at the last day, by saying, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

¹ Luke xix. 27.

¹ ib. xi. 23.

6. Christians ! frequently recollect the covenant which you made with Christ at your baptism. You then avowed yourselves to be His servants, and professed that you would seek for happiness in his favour alone. When you look back on that solemn transaction, let it remind you both of your vows and your privileges. It binds you, in an especial manner, to renounce the world, deny yourselves, bear the cross, endure persecution, and, as faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ, fight against sin and Satan, to the end of your days. A due reflection on such an engagement would tend exceedingly to confirm your faith, excite your love to Christ, strengthen and fortify your minds against temptation, and to encourage your hope of entering into "the rest which remaineth for the people of God."

LECTURE LXXVII.

ON SELF-EXAMINATION.

2 Cor. xiii. 5. *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith ; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates.*

OUR behaviour in the present life is of much more consequence than we are generally disposed to imagine ; since our happiness or misery in the next world essentially depend on the state of our minds, and our conduct in this.

The heart is the seat of action, from whence all that is virtuous or vicious in practice proceeds. "A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things ; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things ; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*."

How important, when seen in this light, is the

* Mat. xii. 34, 35.

advice of Solomon: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; ^afor out of it are the issues of life^b." Our comfort now, and our felicity hereafter, hinge upon the proper cultivation of the heart, and the due regulation of the affections. On this ground, the absolute expediency of looking narrowly into our souls cannot be called in question.

God urges the duty upon us: "Commune with your own heart, and in your chamber; and be still^c." "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Consider your ways^d." "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves^e."

1. The standard by which we should try ourselves, is the Word of God, which is the lamp of truth to light us on the road to heaven^f. Its infallible dictates, and not the erroneous opinions of worldly men, however fashionable, must be the test of right or wrong. Whatever deed we perform, or maxim we hold, or word we speak, which does not accord with the Divine will, is to be rejected, as false and mischievous, and calculated to lead us astray from God. "To the Law, and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them^g."

All our words, thoughts, and actions, must therefore be referred to the Scriptures, that we may be able to determine whether they are such as God will approve or condemn. And we ought to abide by His unerring decision; and not prefer to it our perverse imaginations, or even those of the wisest men, who are not qualified to judge correctly of good and evil, until they are enlightened by the Spirit of truth and wisdom^h.

^a Prov. iv. 23.

^b 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^c 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^d Ps. iv. 4.

^e Ps. cxix. 105.

^f Hag. i. 7.

^g Isa. viii. 20.

2. Self-examination is to be made, touching our principles. We are to inquire, whether our souls are governed by the love and fear of God and the faith of Christ, or by the directions and examples of men.

Even where the mind may be in some degree under the dominion of truth, there may still be, in its profession of godliness, a mixture of improper motives. Our apparent zeal for the glory of God may spring from selfish, and not from religious feelings; from pride, and not from humility; from a self-righteous and ostentatious spirit, and not from a desire simply to honour Jehovah. Jehu boasted greatly, when he had exterminated the worshippers of Baal; saying, 'Come, see my zeal for the Lord!' though his "heart was not right in the sight of God^b." Saul, and Herod, and Simon Magus, made great professions of piety towards God; but they were unsound professors, who sought not his glory, but their own advantage.

Now, as dross and alloy will adhere to the precious metals, whilst in their unrefined state; so grace, even in the best of men, will sometimes be mingled with much that is sinful and erroneous. Hence the need we all have to search our souls to the bottom, in order to prevent any evil principle or motive, which may lurk within them, from impelling us to such a course of action as will displease God and prove an impediment to our salvation.

If good men should daily examine themselves, to discover their errors and reform them; how necessary must it be for unrenowned sinners to submit to this ordeal, that they may know their lost condition, and, before it be too late, apply to Christ to save them!

^b 2 Kings x. 16.

Look then, O impenitent souls ! within yourselves. See the secret abominations of your hearts ; and pray, that, through grace, you may be disposed to cast away your iniquities, lest they should prove the cause of your endless perdition¹.

3. The next point to which our self-examination should be directed, is our general practice. Men's natural blindness and self-love prevent them from discerning the state of their hearts, and the springs which set them in motion. They may, through ignorance of their real condition, be unable to determine whether their religious principles coincide with Scripture or not. But none of us can labour under this uncertainty, in inspecting his life and conduct. If we will but examine ourselves honestly by the light of Sacred Truth, we shall soon perceive whether our actions are of a suspicious and doubtful complexion, whether they are glaringly opposite to the commands of God, or whether they are of such a nature as he will approve.

Palpable sins will never bear examination by "the word of God, which is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart"².

A faithful scrutiny into our whole demeanour will set our characters in a just light. Are our actions illegal, fraudulent, impure ? Are our dispositions inhuman, unholy, and carnal ? Do we allow ourselves to indulge in passion, pride, resentment, malevolence, revenge, covetousness, love of wicked pleasures ? These things prove the soul to be in a diseased condition, requiring an examination to de-

¹ Ezek. xviii. 30.

² Heb. iv. 12.

fect its errors, and constant prayer for grace to renovate and purify it from all uncleanness. Or, do we find our evil tempers subdued? Are we humble, penitent, prayerful? Do we long to be conformed to God in all things, “by casting off the works of darkness, and putting on us the armour of light?” If it be, indeed, thus with us, we need not be afraid to inspect the state of our minds; for such experience affords satisfactory evidence of our conversion from sin to righteousness, and a comfortable hope of everlasting life.

4. The professed end to be answered by this trial of our spirits and conduct, is two-fold.

First, that we may ascertain whether there be any sin in which we are living, which, if persisted in, may prove as hurtful to our souls, as the use of the most destructive poison to our bodies. Every man, who is anxiously desirous to be right, will utter the prayer of the devout Psalmist, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting^k!”

Let us pry, then, into our bosoms, that we may be acquainted with ourselves and all our besetting sins. Such knowledge, though it will humble us, may be the means of our salvation; for, if it should produce a consciousness of our misery and danger, it will compel us to resort to Christ for deliverance. And is it not better to be aware that the enemy has made a breach in the camp, that we may instantly arm ourselves to expel him, than indolently to suppose that all is in safety, and to find ourselves surprised into a surrender, at the very moment when we should defend it to the last extremity?

^k Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24.

Secondly, that, by the grace of God, we may correct our errors and reform our lives. For it will prove fatal to our security, if, after having seen our danger, we do not resort to proper measures to prevent the impending evil from falling upon us. If, then, you perceive, through the teaching of the Holy Ghost, that your hearts are in a ruined, un-sanctified state, do not be unfaithful to your light and convictions; but pray, that being "renewed in the spirit of your mind, you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God¹." The moment any thing appears to be wrong in your principles, thoughts, designs, or practice, it should be abandoned, though it may previously have been as dear and valuable to you as the most necessary member of your bodies. "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell-fire, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched²." The excision of the offending limb, painful as it may be, must be submitted to, for the preservation of the other parts of the body: in plain terms, the sacrifice of every sin, lust, and unholy temper must be cheerfully made, if you would be "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light³."

5. The manner in which this examination of ourselves ought to be conducted, deserves particular notice. Let it be undertaken seriously and considerately, as a work of the deepest concern to us. Let us consider ourselves, during the process of examination, as in the presence of God, and as engaged in a most solemn business, that demands the

¹ Rom. xii. 2. ² Mark ix. 43.-49. Mat. v. 29, 30. ³ Heb. xii. 14.

utmost sincerity in the management of it. Let us be solicitous to know the precise condition in which we stand : and be always ready to confess, deplore, and forsake any iniquity which the trial of our spirits may bring to light.

Do not proceed superficially, or hastily, in this matter. Take sufficient time to sift your souls to the bottom ; for the heart can so disguise its vices, that its various windings, evil workings, and obliquities, cannot be discovered, but by a patient inspection. Search yourselves to the very ground of your hearts, and be not afraid to know the worst of your state. A cursory, superficial inquiry will do no good. If you would extract the core of the matter, you must lay open the wound, and probe it to the bottom ; otherwise there may be some evil concealed, which may gradually poison the whole frame.

To ensure success in our investigations, prayer should be offered up to God for wisdom to direct us in the whole of this weighty affair, that we may not act partially and screen our faults, nor pass them hastily over, and thus defeat the end of the inquiry ; but that we may deal fairly with ourselves, condemning our vices, and resolving, by Divine assistance, to mortify and destroy them.

6. Particular seasons may be set apart for this duty. At the close of every day, it will be profitable to take a survey of our conduct ; and to call ourselves to a severe account for any sins which we have committed, or wrong tempers which we have indulged, or any opportunities which we have omitted of saying or doing anything for God. Let, therefore, the transactions of the day pass in review before us, that bad habits may not be suffered to take such a deep root in our breasts, as to render it impossible to extirpate

them. Besides the evening of each day, the work of self-examination may be profitably engaged in as often as occasion requires. But on the Sabbath, especially, we should devote a portion of our time for the purpose of conversing with our own hearts. On this sacred day, let us be anxious to know how we stand with God, what improvement we have made in righteousness, and whether we have gained any advantage over our besetting sins.

7. The most important benefits will accrue from this line of conduct. The disclosures made, by prying into our souls, will certainly at first be attended with smart and anguish. When we see the abominations which we have committed, in thought, word, and deed, against the Majesty of Heaven, "we shall lothe ourselves in our own sight^{*}," and "smite on our breasts, saying, God be merciful to us sinners!" But the moment we are justified by faith, and obtain peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, our sorrow will be turned into joy. The very medicine, which at first proved nauseous and bitter to the taste, will afterwards be a healing balm, a sweet cordial to our wounded souls. Thus, though, in finding out the sin which most easily besets us, we may be put to momentary pain, yet the discovery will teach us to value the remedy, and to apply it. And when, through faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice, we obtain forgiveness and sanctification, and a well-founded hope of everlasting glory, we shall have a rich counterpoise for our light affliction, and become immense gainers by the examination of our hearts[†].

8. The neglect of this Christian duty must be productive of fatal results. Indifference about the state

^{*} Ezek. xxxvi. 31.

[†] Luke xviii. 13.

[‡] 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

of our souls is to be dreaded ; because it argues that we have no wish to know ourselves, or to please God, or to avoid the wrath which is coming on the ungodly^r. Besides, it demonstrates a love of iniquity, which, by such negligence, is suffered to take root in the heart, and grow worse, until it becomes difficult to eradicate it : it defers, for a short time, the day of trial, which, when it arrives, will bring with it such accumulated and intolerable sorrows, as we had not, in the days of our unregeneracy, the least conception of^s.

How much wiser is it to endeavour to obviate the threatened danger, by a timely application of our minds to the things which respect our final peace!

Would any man to whom a valuable estate had been left, object to examine the title-deed by which it was secured ; and to take immediate possession, in order to enjoy as speedily as possible the advantages which it offered ? And will you, O careless souls ! be altogether unsolicitous to ascertain whether you are training for the blissful inheritance of the saints, or travelling in the " broad road that leadeth to destruction ?"

9. Be in earnest about this important personal concern. Engage in it without further procrastination. Every day, sinful habits, if neglected, become more confirmed ; but if attended to in time, they may be conquered^u.

Enter, then, into the chamber of your souls. converse with yourselves, and with your God. Whilst you are exploring the recesses of your minds, in order to discover your errors, pray after this manner : " O God, what we see not, respecting our depravity by nature, and guilt by practice, teach thou us^u ;

^r Rev. vi. 14—17.

^s 1 Thes. v. 2, 3.

^t Mat. vii. 13.

^u Rom. viii. 13.

^{uu} Job xxxiv. 32.

that, finding the way of life, we may walk steadfastly therein, to the day of our death!" And how blessed will be the result of such a scrutiny, if, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, it should lead to that renewal of our minds, which will inspire us, with confidence at the day of judgment; when penitent and reformed sinners shall obtain everlasting joy and peace!

LECTURE LXXVIII.

ON SELF-DENIAL.

Matthew xvi. 24. *Then said Jesus to his Disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.*

THE ruinous effects which result from the unrestrained indulgence of our carnal desires are seen every day. Multitudes, unable to govern their passions, which clamour for gratification, run headlong into all the vices and follies of life; without duly reflecting, that such a course is incompatible with their Christian calling, and destructive of their peace.

But we shall do well to remember, that there is often much danger in the enjoyment of the very objects which promise most delight. The fruit which captivates the eye may turn out to be the rankest poison, and destroy those who happen to partake of it.

The sinful pleasures of the world answer to this description. Though they allure the senses, and flatter their infatuated devotees with prospects of delectable gratifications, yet this is all illusion; for the moment you strip off the guilt and the tinsel with which they are studiously covered by Satan the father of lies, with a design to impose on his unwary

servants, their utter worthlessness, their tendency to poison and defile the whole man, and to stop up the sources from whence true happiness flows, are clearly seen.

Not a few, who once seemed to bid fair for heaven, have been so entangled by the pleasures of sense, as to have deserted the narrow path which leadeth to eternal glory, and to have made "shipwreck of faith and a good conscience".

Against such an inordinate thirst after pleasure, the voice of God decidedly cautions us, as fatal to the peace and prosperity of our souls; and directs us to cultivate a spiritual taste, in order that we "may approve things which are excellent, and that we may be sincere, and without offence, till the day of Christ^b." "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me^c."

The necessity of attending to this duty, and what it binds us to perform, shall now be stated.

Self-denial is the refraining from the use of those things which, if indulged, would prove injurious to our bodies and souls. The things to which this act of abstinence should extend, are, either those which are improper in themselves, on account of their sinful qualities; or those which, though lawful and harmless in their nature, may nevertheless be abused, and become occasions of injury and falling to others.

1. Of the first class are all sinful indulgences, of what kind soever they be. These are comprehended by St. John, under the three following heads: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life^d."

The objects that are calculated to excite "the

^a 1 Tim. i. 19. ^b Phil. i. 10. ^c Luke ix. 23. ^d 1 John ii. 16.

lusts of the flesh," are those sensual gratifications which minister pleasure to a vicious carnal mind. Under this description, the apostle Paul, in the name of God, interdicts lewdness, fornication, adultery, obscenity in words or actions, drunkenness, gluttony, and every species of excess. Besides these, he specifies other hateful sins, which spring from the same vitiated fountain—"idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, revellings, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God^e."

The "lusts of the eye" are those objects which that organ of sight beholds with an eager desire of the mind to obtain them, as if the possession would secure unmingled satisfaction; such as, the pleasures and emoluments of the world, gold and silver, the possessions and decorations of life; in short, any thing which affords carnal gratification to the eye, or to the animal desires, excited by its communication with the soul.

"The pride of life" consists of the dignities, authority, reputation, splendid titles, honour, and fame of the world, or any other thing which tends to lift men above their fellow-creatures, or to flatter their ambitious pretensions.

Now, in these things the men of the world make up their happiness; after them they aspire continually; and they account the attainment of them the summit of human felicity.

We admit that the world, as it came out of the hands of its Creator, was very good^f, and a proper object of regard, as his work, and for his sake; but

^e Gal. v. 19—22.

^f Gen. i. 31.

as sin hath defaced and filled it with pollution, our affections ought to be alienated from its spirit, maxims, practices, unholy pleasures and amusements. God enjoins us to keep aloof from it; lest we should manifest hostility to him, by maintaining an unhallowed intercourse with it^a:—"Love not the world, nor the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever^b."

Under the division, therefore, of things which must be denied and renounced, every species of sin, every impure desire and gratification, every unholy thought, word, and deed, is expressly included. We are required to put them away from us, as we would a defiled garment, with disgust; to throw them off, lest they should encumber us in running the spiritual race: for if retained, they will certainly thrust us for ever out of heaven. "The night is far spent; the day is at hand: let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ; and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof^c."

2. The Gospel of Christ expects us to carry our self-denial, in some particular cases, to things innocent and unexceptionable in themselves; but which, through our own infirmity, or the weakness and igno-

^a James iv. 4.

^b 1 John ii. 16, 17.

^c Rom. xiii. 14.

range of others, might lay a stumbling-block in their way, and endanger their salvation.

St. Paul states some instances in which it is our bounden duty to comply with the scruples of the weak, and to abstain from the use of things indifferent in their nature, for their edification^k. He has set us an example of conciliation, in this respect, which is worthy of general imitation. Whenever an inflexible regard to the word and glory of God would permit, he yielded to the prejudices of some and to the infirmities of others, and sacrificed his own pleasure in order that he might promote the spiritual welfare of the flock of Christ :—"All things are lawful unto me; but all things are not expedient^l." "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without the law, (being not without the law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some^m."

Now, are there no gratifications of this description which charity to our infirm brethren should make us willing to forego, rather than to injure their tender consciences? Are we careful to walk circumspectly, not abusing our Christian liberty, but shewing all wisdom, and meekness, and condescension; choosing rather to recede, at times, from our undoubted rights, than pertinaciously to

^k Rom. xiv. 19—22. ^l 1 Cor. vi. 12. ^m 1 Cor. ix. 19—24.

contend for them? In a word, Do we deny ourselves the indulgence of every thing that may occasion sin in others, or be the cause of their halting or declension from the ways of God?

If we can sport with the infirmities of our "weak brother, for whom Christ died"; if we refuse to debar ourselves from the enjoyment of things unnecessary or unessential, when they stand in the way of his advancement in the knowledge of heavenly truth; where is our love for Christ? How great were the privations to which He cheerfully submitted, for our redemption! And cannot we make the slightest sacrifice, to promote his glory, and the happiness of his chosen people?

3. This spirit of religious abstinence is conducive to real holiness, whilst it affords a pleasing kind of evidence of our sincerity. Without some degree of self-denial, we can never grow in grace, nor attain any establishment in the Divine life, nor maintain communion with God, nor give any proofs of being in a state of justification and acceptance with the Lord.

How is it practicable to go forward in the way of righteousness, so long as sin is indulged, or not opposed! To give the reins to our passions, and blindly to follow the dictates of unenlightened reason, is the direct method to plunge our souls into the mire of pollution. To give an unrestrained licence to our animal desires, is as sure a step to the obstruction of our minds in their course to holy attainments, as it would be to embarrass the feet of a racer with heavy chains, in order to prevent his arriving first at the goal. "Let us, therefore, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race that is set before us, looking

* 1 Cor. viii. 9, 19.

° ib. viii. 12, 13.

unto Jesus, the Author and the Finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame^p."

Self-denial, under the discipline of the Holy Ghost; is indispensably necessary to the establishment of the soul in good habits. When we are prepared to abandon what God prohibits, when we renounce our most darling sins and pleasures in obedience to his command, and when we strive "to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord," he will increase us with spiritual gifts; he will make our path like that of the just, which is as a shining light, "that shineth more and more unto the perfect day^{pp}."

We should feel prompted to cherish this Christian virtue, in order that God may favour us with manifestations of his kindness. His spirit will not inhabit that heart, nor afford it glimpses of his love in ordinances, which is careless about overcoming its wrong propensities. We are admonished; therefore, not "to grieve, nor to quench the Holy Spirit," who is provoked to withdraw from them that walk disorderly.

Further, how can we so effectually demonstrate our sincerity to others, as by practising those lessons of self-restraint which our holy faith suggests? To shew that we really "are partakers of a Divine nature," it is incumbent on us "to crucify the lusts and affections of the flesh^q," to be dead to the world^r, and to bring our bodies into subjection to our rational souls^{rr}.

We need not be surprised that such high qualifications should be judged necessary for a Christian, when we reflect upon the purity of the Divine nature, or the sanctity of the place into which the righteous

^p Heb. xii. 1, 2.

^{pp} Prov. iv. 18.

^q Gal. v. 24.

^r ib. vi. 14.

^{rr} 1 Cor. ix. 24—27.

shall be admitted, after death. It ought rather to astonish us, that any unsanctified person should ever seriously entertain a hope of enjoying God in Paradise, when he affirms, "There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie*."

4. Self-denial of sinful gratifications cannot be dispensed with, if we would secure the joys of heaven. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord†." This declaration stands as the firm decree of God, which no circumstance can reverse. How, then, can this qualification for the celestial state be obtained, if we do not habituate ourselves every day to fresh acts of self-renunciation! Can the drunkard, the sensualist, the unchaste person, relish the sublime enjoyments of angels? Can they feel any pleasure in the holy worship of Heaven? Can they, who have taken no pains to resemble God, be fit to abide in his presence for ever? Can the man who gives the reins to his depraved passions, whose mind is debased by familiarity with gross carnal delights, derive any satisfaction from spiritual things, for which he has no taste, and to which he affixes no value? Light cannot be more opposite to darkness, nor evil to good, than the condition in which unsanctified men are found, is to that self-denying spirit which is requisite to fit them for everlasting blessedness.

Nor let the nominal Christian deceive himself with a hope of entering into "the rest which remaineth for the people of God," so long as he conforms to the fashions and guilty maxims and practices of "the world which lieth in wickedness," and is more concerned to avoid "the offence of the cross," and

* Rev. xxi. 27. † Heb. xii. 14. * Gal. v. 11.

escape the taunts of the irreligious and profane, than to please God, by "obeying, from the heart, that form of doctrine which hath been delivered unto us^{*}." Such a compliant temper is a decided mark of insincerity; and will assuredly cause that solemn denunciation to be pronounced over them that offend in this manner: "So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth^{**}."

5. Let us examine ourselves touching this point, which is to determine "whose we are, and whom we serve." Do you; then, "take up the cross, deny yourselves, and follow Christ?" Are you in the habit of checking the ebullitions of passion, anger, revenge, and resentment? Do you oppose, by watchfulness and prayer, the pride, ambition, avarice, vanity, conceit, carnal self-love, and self-righteousness, which spring up in your bosoms? Do you carry on a perpetual warfare against every sin, whether of the flesh or spirit? Does it grieve you to perceive the stubbornness of your evil nature; with what difficulty it is kept from gaining the ascendancy over the better desires of the mind; and how often, baffled by the enemy, and by your own inconstancy, you have fallen from your most steadfast purposes, and thus have brought guilt on your consciences? Do you endeavour to abound in all the fruits of righteousness? Are you anxious to be conformed to the mind of God, and to yield him a hearty unreserved obedience? Are you uneasy at the thought, that you do not love him more and serve him better?

If these desires and feelings actuate and govern your souls, there are, indeed, the strongest grounds

^{*} Rom. vi. 17.

^{**} ib. iii. 16.

for indulging a hope, that, having begun "to serve the Lord with all humility of mind," you will persevere in well-doing, and be blessed in your deed.

But if you manifest no concern to regulate your affections and "set them on things above," no wish to bring your appetites and passions into subjection to the Word of God, oh, how awful is your state, amidst all the pretensions which you make of attachment to Christ! Whilst you "call him Lord, Lord, you do not the things which he commands you"; and, therefore, if you reform not, he will give you your "portion with hypocrites and unbelievers."

Oh, renounce a cold system of religion, which costs you no "denial of all ungodliness and worldly lusts," no giving up of your own inclinations to the will of God; and make a complete surrender of yourselves to his service! Such a line of conduct "will bring a man peace at the last," because it is the surest step to attain that blessing.

6. But let the vassals of iniquity reflect how much they lose now, and will forfeit for ever, by submitting to the dominion of Satan, "and yielding their members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin." Is it nothing to be deprived of heaven, and to be cast down to hell, into the doleful regions of despair? Is it, then, for momentary pleasures, falsely so called, that you refuse to taste the joys of Paradise, and will consent to dwell with everlasting burnings?

On the other hand, the people of God, who walk in the path of self-denial and holy obedience, possess every advantage, both in time and in eternity. Whilst they live, no guilt harasses their minds;

¹ Acts xx. 19.

² Luke vi. 46.

³ Mat. xxiv. 51.

⁴ Rom. vi. 13.

because they are pardoned, for Christ's sake. When they approach the hour of death, no forebodings of a dreadful hereafter torment them. But hope fills their souls ; and carries them forward with a prosperous gale, towards their heavenly destination, where, at the appointed time, they arrive, to "enter into the joy of their Lord."

What conquest, then, is more desirable, or more glorious in its nature and effects, than to overcome our corrupt propensities, and lead them captive in the chains of Grace ? This victory, which the Spirit of Righteousness enables us to gain, exalts our souls, and assimilates them to the nature of the blessed God.

Will not you, who are strangers to the power of sanctifying Grace, supplicate the Holy Ghost to assist you in the necessary work of subduing your iniquities, and of "glorifying God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's^b?"

^b 1 Cor. vi. 20.

LECTURE LXXIX.

ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

1 Cor. x. 16. *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*

THIS Sacrament is of the highest importance in the Christian system ; and therefore it deserves particular attention. When a person gives hopeful evidence that he is a partaker of "the inward and spiritual grace," of "the outward visible sign in baptism," even a "death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness," he should come forward to make a profession of his faith in Christ for Salva-

tion, and to declare his purpose of living, in future, according to his Commandments, by joining with his people in receiving the Lord's Supper.

This act of communicating with Christians in a solemn ordinance, especially when it is sincere, is an open acknowledgment of our belief in the Gospel, of our love for Christ and his disciples, and of our desire to live to the honour of His name.

1. Our Divine Saviour, the night in which he was betrayed, and the evening before his crucifixion, "having celebrated the Passover with his Disciples, appointed the Lord's Supper to be a memorial of his redemption, as the Paschal Lamb had been a prefiguration of it. He therefore took bread, and, by prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, set it apart to be the representation of his body. 'He brake it,' to shew that his body must be wounded, bruised, put to great torture, and undergo death, for the redemption of his people; and he directed each of his Disciples 'to eat of that bread in remembrance of him,' to instruct them in the way by which his atonement would be made effectual to their salvation. In like manner 'he took the cup,' and, renewing his prayers and thanksgivings, 'he bade them all drink of it;' as the wine represented his blood, which was about to be shed, to purchase the blessings of the new covenant, and to ratify it in behalf of the whole multitude of believers, for the remission of sins*."

Nothing can be more simple, in its own nature, than this institution of Christ; though superstition has done what it could to misrepresent, obscure, and pervert its design.

"The language of Christ, in appointing this ordinance, is manifestly figurative, and cannot be literally

* Mat. xxvi. 26—29.

interpreted; (unless we should explain the material cup itself to be the blood of Christ, or rather the new covenant;) and this renders it the more wonderful, that a set of men should be so adventurous and absurd, as to require the Church to believe, in contradiction to their senses, that the bread in the Sacrament, after consecration, becomes the real entire body of Christ! But, indeed, the Scripture gives us no intimation of any peculiar mystery in this institution; though strong metaphors are employed, the more emphatically to demand our attention to the importance of the things signified by the outward emblems."

In this manner, Christians, agreeably to the command of their Lord, should, as often as circumstances will permit, meet together, in His name, to celebrate the Sacramental Feast; "for as often as they eat this bread, and drink this cup, they do shew the Lord's death till he come^b." The action is designed to be a perpetual memorial of Christ's sufferings, and of the way in which we become interested in them, even by "feeding on Him, in our hearts, by faith with thanksgiving^c."

The body, which doubtless signifies his entire human-nature as united to the eternal Son of God, is represented by the emblem of bread, the most useful kind of sustenance. His blood, the shedding of which was the immediate cause of his death, denoted the whole of his expiatory sufferings, which terminated when he expired on the cross:

This Sacrament, therefore, through the medium of the outward emblems of bread and wine, strikingly exhibits to the whole world the justice and love of God, the perfection of His law, the evil of sin, the

^b 1 Cor. xi. 26.

^c Communion Service.

vanity of temporal and the importance of eternal things ; and it evidently sets before the eyes of all men, Jesus Christ as having been crucified for their redemption, by reminding them of his dignity and righteousness, the depth of his humiliation, and the intenseness of his agony, the greatness of his condescension and compassionate love, the wretched state of deserved misery from which he has redeemed sinners, the extensive efficacy of his sacrifice, and the happiness to which he exalts every true believer.

2. Certain qualifications, however, are requisite for a proper reception of the Sacrament, and the benefits conveyed thereby ;—and these are, repentance and faith. In the act of receiving the Lord's Supper, we acknowledge our ruined condition as sinners ; from which we could not have been saved, if Christ had not shed his blood to redeem us ; we profess to believe the testimony of God respecting the person and atonement of Christ, and the all-sufficiency of his vicarious sufferings ; we avow our total dependence on the mercy of God, according to the promises and provisions of the new covenant, which was ratified by Jesu's death ; we make a public acknowledgment of our obligations to him as our most gracious Benefactor, and an engagement to obey him as our Lord and Saviour, by cheerfully yielding up our bodies and souls to his service ; and, lastly, we declare that we intend “ to unite ourselves to his redeemed people, to walk with them in Christian love and fellowship, in all the ordinances of Divine worship, and in all holy conversation and godliness.”

“ It is, therefore, most evident, that no man is prepared for this sacred ordinance, or capable of sincerely and intelligently making that profession which is implied in it, unless he be, indeed, a self-con-

demned penitent, who really believes the Gospel, and renounces all other confidences to 'flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before him;' and unless, in his heart, he truly receives Christ Jesus the Lord, as his Prophet, Priest, Ruler, and Saviour, purposing thenceforth to walk in obedience to him."

3. Great advantages arise from frequent communicating, if it be done in a pious and reverential manner:—"for the Lord's Supper as directly tends to strengthen and refresh the believing soul, as the bread and wine do to nourish and invigorate the body." The frequent exhibition of the sacrifice of Christ, which is the central point of our holy religion, is well adapted to increase humility, hatred and dread of sin, watchfulness, contempt of the world, faith, hope, love, joy, gratitude, patience, compassion, meekness, fortitude, and all other holy dispositions. Besides, "at the same time that due honour is rendered unto the Lord, by this repeated profession of our faith and love, the sympathy of religious persons uniting in so affectionate an ordinance promotes edification; the great truths of Christianity are thus brought before the minds of increasing numbers; and the presence and blessing of the Lord may be confidently expected, whilst we thus meet in his name, and present our prayers and thanksgivings before him. Indeed, this institution was expressly intended to 'shew forth the Lord's death till he come;' and this proves that the doctrine of the atonement is the most essential part of Christianity, and an habitual dependence on a crucified Saviour, the grand peculiarity of the Christian character."

4. They who receive the Sacrament unworthily, cannot expect to reap any benefit from partaking of

it; inasmuch as they do not possess that state of soul which is required of those who would profit by the ordinance. The Church thus briefly states the qualifications of a Communicant:—"Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the Commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to your comfort^d!" Every one, then, who lives habitually in open or secret sin, or in the neglect of known duty; who cherishes anger, malice, revenge, pride, envy, avarice, and sensual lusts in his heart; who comes to the Sacrament in order to make atonement for his sins, or to cloke his secret transgressions; who attends on it to quiet a guilty conscience by a self-righteous service, substituting the sign for the thing signified; or who uses it merely as a step to worldly preferment; must "be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord^e," and "eat and drink his own condemnation, not discerning the Lord's body^f."

Surely, then, it becomes all men "to examine themselves, before they presume to eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For as the benefit is great, if with a true penitent heart and lively faith we receive that holy sacrament; (for then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood; then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us;) so is the danger great, if we receive the same unworthily. . . . Judge therefore yourselves, brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord; repent ye truly for your past sins; have a lively and stedfast faith in Christ our Saviour; amend your lives, and be in perfect charity with all

^d Communion Service.^e 1 Cor. xi. 27.^f ib. 29.

men ; so shall ye be meet partakers of those holy mysteries^e."

Many, by their impiety, carelessness, malice, secret vices, or open contempt of the Gospel, render themselves unfit for the holy ordinance of the Sacrament. And numbers approach the Table of the Lord in a proud, hypocritical, and carnal spirit, which constitutes a most heinous sin ; which, unless it be repented of, will vastly increase their final condemnation.

Let, however, those who withdraw from the Sacrament from a consciousness that they are unfit to join with Christians in commemorating the dying love of their Redeemer, seriously consider that they are equally unprepared for death and judgment, and that, whilst in the act of retiring, they plainly declare that they are still "in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity," and without any part or lot in the benefits of His salvation. Indeed, until the enmity of their hearts against the Gospel is subdued, and their lives are conformed to the commands of Jesus, they are as unable to pray acceptably, as to communicate worthily.

Let such persons not rest satisfied with their present state, but be much in earnest in using the means of becoming acceptable Communicants.

5. Serious Christians, whose lives correspond with their profession, ought not, on any pretext, to absent themselves from the Holy Communion.

Some harass themselves with groundless fears, lest, by a well-meant but unsuitable approach to the altar, they should "eat and drink their own condemnation," and deprive themselves of all hope of forgiveness ; though even the scandalous profanation

* Communion Service.

of the ordinance by the Corinthians was only visited by temporal corrections, that they might not be condemned with the world^{ss}.

Others are afraid, lest, after receiving the Sacrament, they should fall from the holy resolutions which they have formed of living near to God, and should render their case desperate. But, although Peter denied Christ shortly after he had both celebrated the Passover and the Lord's Supper, yet he was graciously restored to favour^b.

Others seem afraid of communicating too frequently ; making the languor of their affections an excuse for not attending the Sacrament, by which it is greatly increased ; and forgetting that this heavenly feast is provided for nourishing our souls, in righteousness of life.

It is, then, a duty incumbent on the new convert, who wishes to prosper in his soul, to consider the importance of this institution, and to prepare himself for partaking of the Holy Communion as soon as he can do it sincerely. Let him not suspect any snare, or apprehend any dangerous consequences will ensue from his approaching the Lord's Table, but rather expect to derive from it all the spiritual benefits which it is designed to afford.

And established Believers should evince their love and gratitude to Christ, by obeying his dying command, "This do in remembrance of me¹." Must not every devout Christian be anxious, in this way, to reverence his Divine Lord and Master, and to seek communion with Him with whom he hopes to be united in the enjoyment of everlasting life ?

^{ss} 1 Cor. xi. 29—33. ^b Luke xxii. 31, 32. ib. 19.

LECTURE LXXX.

ON WATCHFULNESS.

Mat. xxvi. 41. Watch, and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.

A HOLY vigilance is not less expedient in our heavenly calling, than courage and prudent conduct are in a soldier when he enters into the field of battle. Indeed, watchfulness is indispensable to the safety of the Christian combatant, because of the power and stratagems employed by the enemies who are arrayed against him. How mindful, then, should we be of the wise admonition of the Apostle: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

That watchfulness which the Scriptures enforce upon us includes not only a constant sobriety of mind and circumspection, which are requisite for discerning the perils which surround us, and for applying the best mode of defence against them, but also an habitual state of preparation, and a defensive posture, in order that we may be in readiness to repel an unexpected attack, or to ward off any danger which may threaten us.

In the patient discharge of this duty, much self-denial will be necessary. The faithful watchman and sentinel will not desert their stations for a moment; lest, in the mean time, the crafty enemy should make a sudden irruption, and carry the post which they occupy, without difficulty. Nor will they indulge in slumber, lest the unlooked-for advance of their foe should throw them into such a consternation and

* 1 Pet. v. 8.

panic as to deprive them of the power of making a formidable resistance ; for the best weapon is but of little use, when the succours of reason are withdrawn, by which we are enabled most successfully to wield it.

Equally solicitous should every soldier of Jesus Christ be to guard against spiritual sloth and drowsiness, against carnal indulgences, against the artifices of Satan, and the delusions of his own heart ; knowing that he is not secure for an hour, except as he holds himself in readiness to withstand the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The advice which our Lord gave to his Disciples, in contemplation of the Day of Judgment, should be acted upon during the whole period of our lives:—
“ Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares : for as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things, and to stand before the Son of Man^b. ”

1. The necessity of holy vigilance in our Christian course arises from a view of the numerous dangers to which Satan exposes us. There is scarcely a step that can be taken, in the present life, which is not attended with some difficulty or peril. Millions of foes, headed by the Prince of Darkness, stand drawn out in hostile array, to intimidate the Christian pilgrim, to oppose his march, and to prevent his entrance into the kingdom of God. “ Put on, therefore, the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. For we

^b Luke xxi. 34—37.

wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. . . . Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace ; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation ; and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God : praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints^c.”

Satan, with malignant cunning, will try every artifice to ruin our souls. At one time, he will suggest there is no occasion to be so precise in our walk, to deny ourselves so rigidly the pleasures of sin, to keep up stated hours for prayer, and to watch against the evil propensities of our minds. And if he can succeed in infusing a spirit of indifference about religion, he will have gained an important victory over us. At another season, he will throw off the disguise of an “angel of light^d,” and boldly tempt us to gratify corrupt inclinations, to cast off even the forms of religion, to ridicule the Gospel, to persecute upright believers, and to go to the greatest lengths of impiety.

Now, if we yield to his insinuations, and are not watchful to defeat his specious as well as his more daring wiles, we shall become an easy prey to our enemy, who lieth in wait to destroy us.

2. The diversified temptations which the world presents to fascinate our senses constitute another

^c Eph. vi. 10—19,

^d 2 Cor. xi. 14.

reason for persevering in watchfulness. To what quarter can we turn our attention, from whence a temptation may not arise? The world attacks our eyes, our ears, and our appetites, with baits adapted to allure them; yea, it addresses our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, in order to draw us away from our steadfastness. Now, how can these repeated assaults be withstood, if we do not endeavour to maintain that sobriety of mind which will at once induce us to watch against the evils which surround us, and enable us to assume such a posture of defence as, with the help of God, will carry us gloriously through every attack?

3. The native wickedness of our own hearts will require the utmost vigilance. There are two principles in the best of men—nature and grace. The former always inclines us to evil; the latter strongly biasses us to good. The one is called “the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts of the flesh;” the other, “the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.” The Apostle tells us, “These are contrary one to the other, so that we cannot do the things that we would.” Indeed, the struggle for victory betwixt the carnal and the spiritual principle is often so determined, that it extorts the bitter exclamation, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

But the state of unrenewed men is still more affecting: in their souls the corrupt principle is predominant: “they are led captive by sin, and the depraved affections which controul them, so that they readily yield to the temptations of the Devil.”

* Eph. iv. 22—25.

† Rom. vii. 24.

‡ Gal. v. 17.

§ 2 Tim. ii. 26.

Now, if the strictest watchfulness is requisite in the case of good men, lest *they* should fall away and make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience¹, how indispensably needful is it for those who, having no grace in their hearts, are easily led astray from the path of righteousness! Jesus says unto all, "Watch, and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

4. The disadvantages under which an unwatchful person labours are, indeed, numerous. First; he is compared, by St. Paul, to one who is asleep². During the hours of repose, how ignorant and unconscious is a man of all the events that are passing around him! How defenceless is his condition! If the midnight assassin should attack him, or the robber should invade his property, he may easily fall by the violence of the former, or be plundered by the craft of the latter.—Secondly; a person who does not "watch and pray," but lives in the allowance of sin, resembles a dead man, who is as insensible of any injury offered to him as he is destitute of means to resist it.

A drowsy, lifeless, sinner is therefore in a very pitiful condition. Insensible of the danger which he incurs from the devices which Satan employs against him, and lost in total ignorance of his own character and state, he goes on hourly in a course of impiety, unconcerned about the misery which must soon overtake him, unless he is raised "from the death of sin to the life of righteousness" by the quickening energy of the Holy Ghost.

The folly of such total want of vigilance was apparent in the sad catastrophe which befel the ungodly world in the days of Noah: "They did eat, they drank,

¹ 1 Tim. i. 19.

² Eph. v. 14.

they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all^k." How little did these unthinking people expect such a fatal overthrow! And how greatly surprised will ungodly men be, "when sudden destruction shall come upon them, and they shall not escape^l!" Is it, then, without just reason that the Apostle exhorts sinners in these words: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light^m!"

5. Christian vigilance is attended with every advantage. Whilst we "are sober, and given unto prayer," though we shall not be exempted from the "temptations which are common to men," yet we shall be, comparatively, secure from evil. Satan will not prevail over those who oppose him with "the whole armour of God." Success is promised to every Child of God who contends with Satan in a Christian spirit and with the weapons of the Gospel:—"Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you," as a foiled and vanquished enemy. Myriads in heaven have overcome the Wicked-one and every danger; and are now enjoying, in the glorified state, the fruits of their victory. St. John saw in vision this triumphant host, and celebrates their victory:—"I beheld, and lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lambⁿ!"

Are you vigilant? "Do you walk circumspectly,

^k Luke xvii. 26, 27.

^m Eph. v. 14.

^l 1 Thess. v. 3.

ⁿ Rev. vii. 9, 10.

not as fools, but as wise men, redeeming the time, because the days are evil^o?" Do *you*, conscious of your feebleness, distrust even your own hearts, as well as your best resolutions? Are you ever "standing on the watch, and setting upon the tower^{oo}," that you may descry your enemies, and be prepared to give them a formidable reception? Unless you take such precautions, the sudden assaults of Satan may cause you to "fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition^p."

6. But are you desirous to know the manner in which you may acquit yourselves, in this holy warfare, with success? Then you must narrowly watch, and studiously observe, the inward springs of action. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life^q."

Be particularly on your guard against constitutional sins; for though they may slumber for a time, when not excited by temptation, yet, in the moment of trial, they are easily kindled into a flame, and made to rage with uncontrouled violence. "Let not sin have dominion over you;" "but watch, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong^{qa}!"

Do not parley with the temptations of the "Father of Lies," lest he should gain an advantage over you. When he infuses evil thoughts, reject them with abhorrence; saying, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan^r!"

Be not enticed into unlawful indulgences, by the specious excuses with which he will furnish you, in order to diminish their guilt, or to make them more attractive. Reject the delusion, in the words of Jo-

^o Eph. v. 15, 16.

^{oo} Hab. ii. 1.

^p 1 Tim. vi. 9.

^q Prov. iv. 23.

^{qa} 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

^r Zech. iii. 2.

seph; "How, then, can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." Even Satan, formidable as he is, may be vanquished by the efficacy of earnest prayer: this is that shield which, when joined with faith in the promises of God, renders our souls invincible. Our Lord's caution is never unnecessary: "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." To place a full reliance on watchfulness without the use of fervent prayer, argues a presumptuous confidence in our own strength, which will expose us to certain failure; but when they are combined, we shall, without doubt, triumph over the hosts of darkness, "and make our calling and election sure." "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching! Verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them^{uu}."

* Gen. xxxix. 9.

* 2 Pet. i. 10.

* Col. iv. 2.

^{uu} Luke xii. 37.

LECTURE LXXXI.

ON RESISTING AND MORTIFYING SIN.

Romans viii. 13. *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*

WHEN a man engages in a contest, it is of great consequence for him to know the character and resources of his opponent, and the injury which he is capable of doing; that he may understand the best method of attack and defence, and by what means he can most effectually annoy his enemy. In the

part where he is most vulnerable, the assault should be made with the greatest force, in order that the victory may be more easily won by a decisive blow. With the same views, a knowledge of the nature and malignity and injurious tendency of sin, as described in the first part of this Work, will suggest to us the wisdom of arming ourselves to withstand its violence. Sin is compared, by St. Paul, to a despotic prince, exercising a tyrannical authority throughout his dominions:—"Sin. hath reigned unto death^a." All mankind are the subjects of its vast empire, and the whole world is the seat of its extensive power. It has caused a sentence of death to be inflicted upon the apostate race of Adam:—"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned^b." No man is exempted from its fatal stab; though penitent believers in Christ will escape "the second death^c," which is banishment to hell, into which obdurate sinners will finally be thrust^d.

Such is the destructive power of sin over all who submit to its hateful influence.

The expediency, therefore, of offering resistance to sin may be established on the strongest grounds. Its tendency to despoil us of righteousness and peace, to fill the mind with enmity against God and dislike of His reasonable service, the fetters with which it binds our souls and bodies, and the disqualifications which it brings us under for serving God or for enjoying his presence, are considerations which might serve to convince us that we should not tamely yield to sin, but oppose, with the greatest

^a Rom. v. 21.

^c Rev. xx. 6.

^b Rom. v. 12.

^d Rev. xiv. 9—12.

determination, all its malevolent attempts to bring us under its dominion.

Do we, then, aspire after liberty, that noble freedom of the Children of God ; which consists in the emancipation of our souls from the chains of sin, and in our being brought into a capacity to delight in God, and to advance our nature to the highest degree of perfection to which it can arrive ?

To attain so exalted and happy a condition, who would not be willing to shake off the usurped authority of sin ? Who would be so lost to the excellence of the soul, and the joys which are prepared for it in heaven, as to suffer it to be enslaved by hurtful lusts, prejudices, and passions ? Who would suffer his heart to be the abode of unclean spirits, instead of having it “for an habitation of God through the Holy Ghost,” whose influences fill it with sanctity and gladness ?

Another motive to resist all unrighteousness, equally cogent with those which have been stated, is the dishonour which it offers to the Law of God. Can those who call themselves Christians freely allow themselves in practices which are affronting to God ? How contrary would such a temper be to the whole tenor of their baptismal covenant, in which they promised “to renounce the world, the flesh, and the Devil, to confess the faith of Christ crucified, to fight manfully under his banner, and to continue his faithful soldiers and servants unto the end of their lives^{ad}.”

How, then, shall they who, by a profession so solemn, are dead to sin, live any longer therein* ! Christians, on the contrary, are exhorted to put off

^{ad} Baptismal Service.

* Rom. vi. 7—22.

“ the body of sin^f,” and to “ have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them^g.”

Stimulated by such resistless motives, the obedient Christian will inquire, How am I to contend successfully against iniquity? How can I “ fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life^h?”

Now, we must carry our resistance, first, against every kind of sin, whether it be notorious and atrocious, or less heinous and secret sin; whether it be sin of omission or commission, of ignorance or presumption. Secondly, we are required to oppose most strenuously our besetting sins—those constitutional iniquities which are grafted in us, and too frequently gain the ascendancy over us; such as, pride, revenge, covetousness, worldly-mindedness, self-righteousness, an unforgiving, or malevolent spirit. These sins, by long indulgence, take deep root in the soul, and cannot be subdued but by a persevering and courageous opposition.

Nor will it be allowable to give any quarter even to sins of the most pleasing form, or to those which promise the greatest advantage. Every beloved lust must be sacrificed, every darling sin must be forsaken, and every favourite idol renounced, if we have any wish to please God who calls us to holiness^{hh}.

1. That resistance which will ensure a conquest over sin, must be firm. There are seasons when the courage of the warrior must rise to the highest pitch, to overcome the obstacles that surround him; and when nothing but the most resolute bravery will give him the superiority over his foe.

^f Rom. vi. 6.

^h 1 Tim. vi. 12.

^g Eph. v. 11.

^{hh} Mark ix. 43—50.

The Christian combatant must display the same undaunted and unyielding spirit in defending himself against those legions of darkness which will assail him. A victory over such foes cannot be hoped for, without the most daring valour and resolution. Hence, to make us "more than conquerors" over our adversaries, the Scripture urges us "to endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ¹;" to fight courageously under His banners; and "to resist, even unto death," rather than to give up our souls as a prey to the ravages of sin, and to the dominion of Satan^k.

2. Our opposition should be persevering. In an arduous and protracted contest, the most valiant efforts continued only for a short time will prove fruitless. Patience, and unremitting endeavours, accompanied with a resolution to conquer or die, are often requisite to bring the battle to a favourable issue^l. Our resistance to sin must be carried on in this spirit; because it will strive hard for the victory; nor will it desist from its rancorous hostility, till death shall place us beyond its power.

In our encounters with sin, we may, at times, obtain a partial advantage over it, and fancy we have subdued it; but, if we are not vigilant, it will soon recover its native strength, and rally its forces: and if it should find us unprepared, it will teach us, by more vigorous attacks, and by an easy victory over us, that it is dangerous to sleep at our post, or relax our exertions, whilst so formidable an enemy is in existence.

Hence the policy of daily striving, by prayer and faith and watchfulness, to subdue our iniquities, and to give them no opportunity of acquiring strength:

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 3.^k Eph. ii. 2.^l 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.

for as a few sparks of fire lying amongst the dying embers may be sufficient to raise a flame, so a little indulgence shewn to a less-offensive sin may in time take away our dread of committing the most outrageous violations of God's Law, and produce in us a total "hardness of heart, and contempt of his holy word and commandment."

Let us, then, not tamely yield to transgression; but vigorously and unceasingly oppose it, lest it should insinuate itself into the camp of our hearts, before we think it has arrived at the gates. How much wiser is it "to abstain from all appearance of evil^m," than to sport with the dagger, which has stabbed our fellow-creatures, and deprived them of that happiness, which the Son of God could not regain but through the bitter pains of crucifixion!

3. Again; we are enjoined by the Lord, not only to resist, but to mortify sin; that is, to kill it by a lingering, though certain death. Believers are, in a spiritual sense, dead to sin, and alive to "righteousness". For this reason, they are addressed by St. Paul, in the following terms: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth^o;" yea, even "crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts^p," "that the body of sin may be destroyed, that henceforth you may not serve sin^q."

How much better is it to cut off a mortified limb, than to endanger, by retaining it, the whole body^r!

And is it not equally wise to renounce the most pleasurable vanities, rather than to kill our souls, and rob them of the hallowed pleasures of heaven? And should we not be willing to suffer a little momentary pain, and to submit to self-denial for a short

^m 1 Thess. v. 22.

ⁿ Rom. vi. 11.

^o Col. iii. 5.

^p Gal. v. 24.

^q Rom. vi. 6.

^r Mat. v. 30.

period, in order to promote the health and salvation of our souls ?

Let us, then, bring out the lusts and evil habits and corrupt passions and desires of our hearts, and slay them at the foot of the cross. A contemplation of the sufferings of Jesus on the accursed tree, by a lively faith, will give a mortal blow to the reigning power of sin : for how can we think lightly of it, when we see what accumulated sorrow, what intense agony, it occasioned the mind of the holy Jesus !

If, then, we go to Calvary every day, and reflect on the scene which it presents of a dying Saviour, we cannot fail to derive the strongest motives for mortifying sin, and for treating it as an enemy who must be subdued, before we can enjoy complete repose. A sight of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ produced these salutary effects upon St. Paul ; “ by whom,” says he, “ the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world ;” so that I view the world, as little impressed by all its charms, as a spectator would be by any thing which had been graceful in the countenance of a person, when he beholds it blackened in the agonies of death ; and am no more affected by the objects around me, than one that is expiring would be struck with any of those prospects which his dying eyes might view from the cross on which he was suspended^u.

Let it at all times be recollected, that to render our resistance of sin effectual, we must be supported by strength from on high ; for it is hazardous, in the extreme, for us singly, and unaided by Divine power, to combat with our spiritual foes ; any one of whom would be able to destroy us, unprotected by the arm

^u Luke xxii. 42—45. Mat. xxvi. 38. xxvii. 46.

^v Gal vi. 14.

^u Doddridge's Family Expositor.

of Omnipotence. And, further; such an unequal contest is quite superfluous, because God is ready to grant all needful succour to those who invoke it. Indeed, knowing the number and potency of our adversaries, he cautions us not to venture on the conflict without being furnished with spiritual weapons from the magazine of Grace:—"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day^x."

Supported by the mighty God of Jacob, we shall be able to resist and overcome the most formidable powers of sin and hell.

Look at the immense multitude who, covered with the shield of faith and prayer, conquered in the day of battle, and are now enjoying in mansions of glory the fruits of their happy conquest^y!

You will most certainly obtain a victory over sin and depraved affections, not less decisive and important in its results, if you "work out your salvation with fear and trembling;" depending for success on the Lord, "who giveth strength and power unto His people^z."

^x Eph. vi. 12, 13.

^y Rev. vii. 9—17.

^z Psalm lxviii. 35. Phil. ii. 12, 13.

LECTURE LXXXII.

ON SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD.

2 Corinthians vi. 17, 18. *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing ; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you ; and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*

RELIGION is a holy concern, which proposes the glory of God and the happiness of man.—Now, in order to maintain communion with the Deity, reason teaches us to seek those dispositions of soul which are pleasing to him.

God expects us to abstract ourselves, as much as we can, from all unnecessary commerce with the world ; whose character needs only to be known to justify such a separation. As the world came out of the hands of its Divine Former, it was pronounced “very good,” and it was a beautiful specimen both of His power and wisdom. But sin has converted it into a theatre of misery, in which every description of vice is exhibited, in utter opposition to the will of God. Its plans, purposes, and pleasures, are sinful ; and its spirit is in open rebellion against his authority^a: yea, “the whole world, except the people of God, is said to lie in wickedness^b,” or to acquiesce in the government of Satan, who is styled the “Prince of it^c,” “and worketh in the hearts of the Children of disobedience^d.”

To manifest, then, a decided regard for the world, which is as hostile to God as it is inimical to our own felicity, is the way to offend him, and ruin ourselves. In truth, any degree of friendship with it, in things forbidden, is impossible ; unless we will asso-

^a James iv. 4.

^c John xiv. 30.

^b 1 John v. 19.

^d Eph. ii. 2.

ciate with it at the peril of our souls^a. Thousands, in all ages, have lost heaven through an idolatrous love of this wicked world: ensnared by its maxims and spirit, they “have drowned themselves in perdition^f.” Demas and Hermogenes and Phygellus among professors^g, and a multitude of others who knew not God, have thus sacrificed ineffable bliss, for the vain and polluting and miserable pleasures of the world! Their awful fate should be a lasting admonition to us, not to estrange ourselves from God for the transitory gratifications which this life affords! God, desirous of the welfare of his rational creatures, not only reprobates the folly and madness of a worldly, vicious life; but complains of it, as a mark of the basest ingratitude shewn towards himself:—“My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters; and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water^h.”

1. That separation from the world, which it is our business to inculcate, does not call for a monastic seclusion from life and its various affairs. We were sent into the world not to waste our time in idleness, but to attend to the duties of our respective stations. A proper attention to our several callings is fully compatible with the most exalted piety.

St. Paul exhorts us to combine industry with religion, when he says, “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit, serving the Lordⁱ.” Nay, he proceeds further, and condemns those who neglect to make suitable provision for their families:—“If any man provide not for his own, especially for those of

^a 1 John. ii. 15.

^f Tim. vi. 9.

^g 2 Tim. iv. 10. & i. 15.

^h Jer. ii. 13.

ⁱ Rom. xii. 11.

his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel^k."

Besides, we are members of society, and have duties to perform towards it which cannot be dispensed with. Hence men must have some connection with the world, otherwise its ordinary affairs could not be transacted.

God does not, therefore, require his servants to retire from the world, and to imprison themselves in dens and caves of the earth; or to immure themselves in convents and cloistered retreats, as if it were sinful or unlawful to hold any intercourse with their fellow-creatures, or impossible to serve him faithfully in such a probationary state. All he enjoins us is, to take particular care, when we come in contact with carnal men, to evince that we are not of the world, either as to its spirit or guilty practices; but that we maintain intercourse with it only for the management of our necessary business, or to benefit it by our instruction and example.

Yet it is incumbent on Christians to remember, that, as the world is a scene of temptation which endangers the salvation of their souls, the seldomer they mix with it the better. Their commerce with it should be regulated by the demands of duty; and every thing they have to manage in it, should be done in a spiritual frame, and with a view to the glory of God; that so "they may escape its corruption through lust^l," and render it better, and not worse, for their communicating with it.

Nominal Christians, however, instead of exercising such caution in their approaches to the world, plunge themselves heedlessly into its fascinating vortices; just as if none had been already swallowed

^k 1 Tim. v. 8.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 1—4.

up by them ; or as if no harm could ensue from an unrestrained indulgence of its vanities. Now what does this fearless and unwarranted communion with the world argue, but a wish to drink of that cup which has poisoned countless thousands of our fellow-sinners, who, when it is too late, regret their attachment to a world of iniquity, which has led them to revolt from God.

Their destruction does not, however, operate as a salutary admonition to deter others from the same infatuation : for numbers can sleep securely on the enchanted ground, though the voice of God often proclaims in their ears, " Arise ye, and depart ! for this is not your rest. Because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction^m."

But if we thus cleave in our heart to the world, we must share its destiny, and finally perish with itⁿ.

2. The Word of God, after allowing us such a necessary intercourse with the world as we have glanced at, demands that we separate from it, both in heart and conduct.

We must not sanction, much less act according to the principles of the world, when they oppose Revelation ; for this would be to treat the will of God with contempt, and to prefer the maxims of weak misguided creatures to the wise dictates of Him whose prerogative it is to be infallible.

Nor will it be sufficient to plead, in defence of any wrong sentiment or practice, that it has had the reverence of our ancestors, or is countenanced by many who stand high in the estimation of men. If the maxim be condemned by God, no human authority, however great, can make that good which He pronounces evil.

^m Micah ii. 10.

ⁿ 2 Pet. iii. 10.

Every principle, in morals and religion, should be referred for examination to the Word of God, and be approved or rejected as it accords with, or differs from it. “To the Law and to the Testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them°.”

Now, if many of those sentiments which are so fashionable amongst us were judged of by this perfect rule, they would be deservedly branded with reproach, as being confessedly repugnant to the will of the Lord. Tried by this standard, many sins, to which specious names are given, would appear truly execrable: covetousness would not be disguised under the imposing terms of parsimony, economy, or prudence; revenge would not lose its criminality by being called a proper retaliation, but be justly exposed, as a murderous, diabolical feeling, which is hateful to God^p; pride would not be mis-termed the shewing of a becoming spirit, but would be regarded as an abomination to the Lord^q; and many of those popular sentiments, to which usage has affixed the epithets of honourable and manly, would be seen, when viewed through this just medium, to be as vicious and disgraceful, as they are injurious to the welfare of our souls.

Surely, then, all who have any solicitude about pleasing God will feel no hesitation in appealing from the judgment of the world, whenever it dares to applaud what He forbids, and to condemn what He admires. Let us take care to derive our principles of action, not from the uncertain and often polluted stream of public opinion, but from the unerring Word of God; because our practice cannot

° Isa. viii. 20. 2 Pet. iii. 10. 1 John ii. 17.

^p Mat. v. 21—23.

^q Prov. vi. 16, 17.

be virtuous and holy, so long as our principles are loose or unsettled.

The maxim of Christ, no less than the admonition of the Apostle Paul, shews that it is a matter of the first importance to have such principles fixed in our minds as may excite us to a consistently religious course. "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by his fruit^r."

"Hold fast the form of sound words^s." "It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace^t."

3. It is incumbent on us to separate ourselves, also, from the pursuits of worldly men; because a marked difference of spirit and taste should be manifested by us, if we would prove ourselves to be the servants of the Almighty. Worldly people pursue, with an insatiate appetite, the things of time and sense—objects "which perish in the using." Christians cannot act in this manner: their affections must be fixed, "not on things which are on the earth, but on those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right-hand of God^u." Dedicated to His honour, they must desire better pleasures, more noble enjoyments, than those which are merely secular. To grow in conformity to the will of their Heavenly Father, to abandon every pernicious way, to increase in gracious dispositions, and to know more of God and his Son Jesus Christ, and the matchless wonders of his redemption, should be the leading desires of their minds. Their treasure should be in heaven; and to gain its transporting joys, must be the nearest wish of their heart.

^r Mat. xii. 33.

^s Heb. xiii. 9.

^u 2 Tim. i. 13. Rom. xii. 19—21.

^t Col. iii. 1—3.

4. A Christian is required to evidence his separation from the world by differing most materially from it in practice. Many of those sins which carnal men ignorantly deem harmless offences wear quite another aspect in Scripture. Drunkenness, fornication, adultery, avarice, fraud, and extortion—crimes which, through the frequency with which they are committed, have almost lost, amongst some people, their native turpitude—still retain all their characteristic odiousness before God; and are stigmatized by Him as deadly sins, which he will visit at the Last Day with the heaviest indignation*. But these are transgressions of the Divine Law, which are not to be named, much less perpetrated by Believers in Christ Jesus†.

Christians, in order to evince the superiority of their principles, and the dignity of their heavenly calling, will retire from the sinful amusements of the world. They will not resort to the Theatre; because the scenes which are acted there have a most powerful tendency to efface every serious impression from the mind, and to induce those habits of levity and inconsideration which are incompatible with that constant preparation for death, judgment, and eternity, in which it is proper for us to live.

Plays, from the loose materials of which they are often constructed, and the manner in which they are exhibited to the public eye, are productive of far greater mischief to the moral and religious interests of men than can easily be conceived.

The love of frequenting the Theatre has destroyed thousands, whose minds have been debauched and vitiated by its polluting representations. Hence it is obvious, that the profanation of Sacred things, the

* Eph. v. 5.

† ib. 3, 4.

blasphemous appeals to Heaven to attest the most palpable falsehoods, the obscenity in the dress, language, actions, and gestures of the actors; the attempts which are sometimes made to make the most flagitious conduct appear heroic, amiable, and virtuous, and, at times, to degrade true excellence; prove the Play-house to be a place to which a good man cannot conscientiously resort. He will, therefore, studiously shun every temptation "to filthiness, and foolish talking and jesting, which are not convenient; but rather addict himself to giving of thanks*."

The Christian will be equally careful to avoid every place of public dissipation. He will not venture within the fashionable, though destructive, precincts of the assembly and the midnight revel. The false and dangerous pleasures which these afford will have no power to allure them that are bent on the pursuit of Divine objects. Indeed, the insipid amusements and foolish recreations in which worldlings delight have nothing to recommend them to reflecting minds; and when we see multitudes eagerly running after every vanity which their sickly imaginations can present before them, how can we have a more convincing proof of their estrangement from God? Would wise and good beings forsake the fountain of true enjoyment, to drink at the foulest streams of sin, if they knew in what their real welfare consisted? Certainly not. As soon would they swallow the deadliest poison, as engage in "the pleasures of sin," did they but know their fatal tendency to alienate their souls from God, to give them a total distaste for religion, and to rob them of the everlasting happiness of heaven.

Indeed, there is something peculiarly wrong in the

* Eph. v. 4.

spirit, pursuits, pleasures, and general practice of the ungodly world, which a good man cannot approve of. Added to this consideration, the danger to be apprehended from an imitation of its manners is so fearfully great, that he is obliged to treat it with the same cautious suspicion as we are accustomed to observe towards an avowed enemy.

5. The most urgent necessity exists for our separation from the world, for the following reasons: first, because its spirit and fashions and maxims are inimical to God, whose government is dishonoured by them. To apprise us of the hazard we run by courting its smile, the apostle James thus addresses us:—"Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God^a."

Can any reason be stronger than that which this fact suggests, for withdrawing from the temptations and pleasurable vanities of the world; which, in proportion as we are led by them, will defile, and not profit, our minds; will inflame our passions, and not keep them in Christian subjection?

Can we entertain that in our bosoms, as a friend, which is the declared enemy of God? Can we deliberately join his adversaries, and espouse their cause against him? This would be an act of the blackest ingratitude, in return for his unspeakable mercies; a species of the foulest treason and rebellion against his Divine Majesty.

Withdraw, then, if you value the favour of Almighty God, from this accursed thing; lest it should destroy both soul and body in hell^b.

Secondly: another argument for separation from the world, and for the exercise of jealousy in all our

^a James iv. 4.

^b Mat. v. 29, 30.

approaches to it, is the profession of religion which we make. This binds us, by the most solemn obligations, to a holy life.

As the Nazarites, under the Levitical economy, were devoted to God by a sacred vow, which obliged them to conform to the prescribed rules of abstinence^c, and to refrain from the use of every thing that could in the least degree contaminate their hearts and render them unfit for communion with God in his ordinances ; so Christians, by their baptismal covenant, by the rite of Confirmation, and more especially by the dedication of themselves to the service of God at the time of their conversion, give themselves up to the Lord as his unalienable property, to honour, love, and obey Him, so long as they continue on earth ; that after the dissolution of their bodies, they may enjoy his glorious and beatifying presence for ever in heaven.

Fearing lest we should forget the dignity of our sacred calling, and the obligations which it lays us under to righteousness of life, the Apostle thus addresses us :—"What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's^d."

How, then, can we be Christians, if we desecrate our souls by unholy lusts and pleasures?

To those who profess to follow Christ, and yet incautiously mix with worldly and profane persons, and allow themselves to join in schemes of carnal merriment, St. Paul proposes these questions, which they should duly and calmly reflect on.—"What

^c Numb. vi. 1—22.

^d 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the Living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord God Almighty.*

The Jews were compelled, by the law of Moses, to use the utmost care, lest they should contract any ceremonial defilement. If they unwittingly held intercourse with an unclean person, or touched a dead body or any other prohibited object, they were considered as polluted, and were deemed unfit to join in the service of the Lord, until they had submitted to the appointed rites of purification†.

If God required such external marks of purity under a dispensation which was so soon to be abolished, can we feel any surprise, if, under the Gospel, which more clearly reveals His will, he should exact from his spiritual worshippers a separation from the world and its unhallowed spirit, and the cultivation of those devout affections which alone can qualify them for the fruition of his eternal glory?

* 2 Cor. vi. 14—18.

† Lev. xi. 1—47.

LECTURE LXXXIII.

UNRESERVED SURRENDER OF THE HEART TO GOD.

Proverbs xxiii. 26. *My son, give me thine heart.*

CREATION, redemption, and the mercies which his providence hourly showers upon us, give unto God the strongest claims imaginable to our especial regard. The paternal care which he exercised over us through the helpless years of infancy, his unremitted kindness in supplying our various necessities, the manifold deliverances vouchsafed to us from disease and death, call upon us, in the loudest manner, to glorify God, who has done so much to promote our happiness.

The heart is the seat of religion. When its several powers are engaged in the cause of righteousness, then we delight in God as our portion; and the Gospel of Christ assumes in the mind a reality and importance unknown before, and every thing is valued in proportion as it tends to promote the interests of true piety in the soul. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness;" and the effects of faith upon it are, that love and obedience to God which constitute acceptable religion.

We cannot, therefore, feel astonished that God should account every thing but the devotion of the inmost soul as comparatively worthless, and of no avail in our religious services. To shew that nothing less will satisfy him, he prefers the request to every one who wishes to secure his Fatherly regard: "My Son, give me thine heart." With this gift he is more pleased than with the most expensive offering.

* Romans x. 10.

† Prov. xxiii. 26.

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit ; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

1. The surrender of the heart consists in yielding up its faculties to the service of God. With the will and affections, we should choose God as our portion, seek delight and satisfaction in his service, and determine in favour of “the things which are excellent.” With the understanding, we should endeavour to discover his will, and “to worship him in spirit and in truth^d.” The conscience should be placed as a sentinel at the door of the soul, to warn it against the danger of temptation, and to stimulate it to a faithful discharge of its duty ;—in a word, with the various energies of the mind we should honour God to the full extent of our ability.

2. When the heart is thus given up and consecrated to the Lord, it most cheerfully renders a positive obedience to his will.

God’s positive will must be consulted by those who wish to glorify him. He has strictly charged us to observe his ways, and to reverence his Word, Sabbaths, and Ordinances. Accordingly, to pray to him, to praise him for his mercy to us, and to enthrone him in our affections, to mortify every sinful desire, to live above the world, and to be daily preparing for heaven by the acquisition of spiritual graces and tempers, such as faith, hope, humility, love, joy, patience, temperance, long-suffering, gentleness, and goodness^e, is the necessary and important work of God’s servants on earth. Nor will he give this honourable name to any one who does not heartily endeavour to comply with every injunction of his revealed will. No reservation of the heart for worldly vanities—no compromise betwixt its

^c Psalm li. 17.

^d John iv. 24.

^e Gal. v. 22.

duties on one side, and its inclinations on the other—will be permitted by God, whose Sovereign will must be the only rule of action^f.

Equal attention must be paid to those duties which require the exercise of self-denial. It is expected not only that we should believe, but also be willing “to suffer in behalf of Christ,” if occasion require it^g. A readiness to bear reproach and loss for Christ, and to yield unfeigned submission to the dispensations of Providence, will shine through the conduct of those who engage in their hearts to serve the Lord.

3. Let it not be forgotten, that, in order to demonstrate the surrender of the whole man to God, the heart must be abstracted from every other object, and set exclusively upon him as its satisfying portion.

First; the believer, in devoting himself to God, avows that he does not look for satisfaction from this world; or from any thing which it has to bestow. He does not, therefore, as others do, ardently covet earthly good: nor is he disappointed if the mercies which he possesses do not yield complete happiness; because he is aware that it is not in the power of mere creatures to supply the place of God, who alone can satisfy the largest wishes of the mind. Whilst the Christian values the blessings which God confers upon him, and uses them with a thankful heart, he dares not love them excessively, as worldly men do; because he is aware that the Scripture pronounces such attachment an act of idolatry, by which Jehovah is robbed of his glory, which is transferred to perishable objects^h.

^f John xiv. 15—25.

^g Phil. i. 29.

^h Isa. xlii. 8. Rom. i. 25.

Secondly: the soul which is unreservedly given up to the Lord seeks its happiness from him alone. It views God as the exhaustless fountain of real blessedness, who by his wisdom devises, and by his omnipotence executes, the plans which are to impart felicity. It seeks, therefore, in communion with him, those satisfying enjoyments which are adapted to minister to its spiritual wants. Should it surprise us, then, if we hear a devout Believer saying, "Thou, O God! art the thing that I long for." "The desire of my soul is to Thy name, and to the remembrance of Thee¹."

If the Lord indulges the heart which is devoted to him with manifestations of his favour, the sweetest joy and peace abide therein; but if he hides his face, it is filled with trouble and suspense, and mourns his absence as the greatest calamity².

Nor let it be objected that such a surrender of the heart to God is unreasonable. Has not He who called us into existence, and sustains us by his daily bounties, an undoubted right to the strongest expression of our gratitude in return?

We are ready to do any thing in our power for those whom we love and esteem: and shall we think it too much to yield up ourselves unto the Lord, "who has bought us with a price," and desires us to give him our souls, not to despoil, but to enrich them with all the treasures of grace and glory³?

To make such an absolute surrender of ourselves to the service of Heaven is to evince the truest concern for our temporal and eternal welfare. Think, for a moment, of the unspeakable glory reserved for the righteous, the exemption from sorrow, and the possession of inconceivable bliss, which they will

¹ Isa. xxvi. 8.

² Psalm x. 1. lxxxviii. 1—17.

³ Rev. iii. 2), 21.

inherit through endless ages ! If the peace of God, which now attends such devotion of the soul to him, passeth all understanding, what celestial raptures will fill the bosoms of his servants, when they stand “ in his presence, where there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand, where there are pleasures evermore^m ! ”

Reader, inquire—Have you made this surrender of yourself to God ? Has he the sole possession of your heart ? Do your affections go out after him as the chief good ? Do you study to render a sincere and uniform obedience to all his injunctions, without excepting those which oblige you to give up your own will and gratification ?

If this be the state of your soul, as attested by a holy life, “ Oh, well is thee, and happy shalt thou beⁿ ! ”

But if you are still carried away by worldly objects, desires, and pursuits, if you have no wish to honour God by a thorough compliance with the demands of his Gospel, then “ your heart is not right with God^o ; ” but you act as a rebel against his government, as one who is in league with the devil, and as the slave of the most wicked passions. “ Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey ; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness^p ? ”

4. The necessity of surrendering our hearts to God is obvious. The argument by which St. Paul enforces this indispensable duty ought to produce a conviction in every one's mind that God is the rightful proprietor of our hearts. “ I beseech you,

^m Psalm xvi. 11.

^o Acts viii. 20, 24.

ⁿ ib. cxxviii. 2.

^p Rom. vi. 16.

therefore, Brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God^a!"

Now, without this dedication of ourselves, and all our talents, to the glory of the Most High, our professions of affection to God are vain. Can you have any proper regard for him, when you withhold your heart, and refuse to do him the homage which he demands? Whilst your affections eagerly pursue every trifling pleasure and vanity, how can you be said to maintain supreme love for God? "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon^r."

Decision is absolutely expedient in this matter, because there is no neutrality in religion. "He that is not with me," says the Great Redeemer of Mankind, "is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth^s."

God accounts those as his enemies who do not delight in him, and act in entire subserviency to his will.

Can you bear, then, to be cast off eternally by God, and to be doomed to unquenchable fire? Will you risk the felicity of Paradise for the indulgence of transitory pleasures, which yield, at best, but a delusive satisfaction? A few years, and all the trifling objects which seduce your souls from God will

^a Rom. xii. 1—3.

^r Mat. vi. 24.

^s Luke xi. 23.

vanish away! "but he that doeth the will of God shall abide for ever".

You have forsaken your Maker;—return to him without delay, that you may regain his lost favour.

Commence immediately this solemn act of dedicating yourselves to His service. Time is on the wing; and not many days may elapse before you may be connected with the eternal state! Upon this supposition, you have not a moment to lose.

In the performance of this religious act, let every conscious sinner thus address God in sincerity:—
 'I confess, O Lord, that I have causelessly deserted thee, by going astray like a lost sheep. With shame I look back on my past conduct, and deeply regret that I have wasted so much invaluable time in the service of Satan. Now enable me, by thy grace, to give up my heart and affections to Thee. Employ them in promoting Thy glory, and in doing good to my fellow-creatures. Take, therefore, exclusive possession of my soul, and bind it to thyself, that it may wander no more in the way of evil. O Lord, draw me with the cords of love; and encourage me to follow thee, and live in obedience to thy will, unto the end of my days!'

God will most certainly assist those who feel desirous to be set apart to His service. When he puts "his Spirit within them", the work of dedication becomes easy and delightful; and the sweet peace which is consequent upon it proves that our duty is an unspeakably precious privilege.

* 1 John. ii. 15—18. * Ezek. xxxvi. 26—28. * Isa. xxxii. 17.

LECTURE LXXXIV.

ON SALVATION BY CHRIST JESUS, AND A PERSONAL APPLICATION TO HIM FOR THAT PURPOSE.

John vi. 35. 'Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life :—he that cometh to me shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.'

SALVATION is a theme which affords matter of delightful contemplation to angels^a, who wish to explore its astonishing depths, in order that they may know more of the “ manifold wisdom of God,” as it is graciously displayed in our redemption by his Son^a. Now, if those holy and dignified Beings, who have no need of a Saviour, feel such a lively interest in the subject of man’s redemption, and delight to “ minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation^b,” how justly “ chargeable with folly” will those persons be, who, although personally concerned in the benefits of Redeeming Love, without which they must perish for ever, still refuse to seek them in the appointed way!

But, though the great bulk of mankind thus despise or neglect the salvation which is in Christ, there are some of a more serious and reflective turn, who think it worth their while to submit to any privations, or to make the most costly sacrifices, to obtain its blessings. To understand, then, in what Salvation consists, and how it is to be secured and enjoyed, is what all who perceive its value and excellence will strive after.

1. Salvation, in an ordinary sense, implies a state of extreme peril, and exposure to death and destruction, from which it rescues the sufferer^{bb}. Now, that all men in a state of unconversion, and before

^a 1 Pet. i. 12.

^{aa} Eph. iii. 9, 10.

^b Heb. i. 14.

^{bb} Exod. xiv. 10—31.

they participate in the redemption of Christ, are wretched and miserable sinners, liable to eternal death, may be proved from the words of our Saviour, in which he declares the object of his mission into the world:—"The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost^c;" that is, the whole "world, which God so loved, as to give for it his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life^d."—Behold here the lost condition of man, the unbounded benignity of God, the matchless compassion and dying love of the Lord Jesus!

2. Salvation, in a Scriptural sense, as applying to a ruined world, expresses a deliverance from all the penal consequences to which sin renders men liable; a deliverance from the curse of the broken Law, from the wrath of God, and from all the terrors of the world to come; and, at the same time, it imports the bestowment of "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus^e." In fine, salvation by the Gospel is a translation from the death of sin to a life of righteousness, from guilt to pardon and acceptance with God, from the greatest misery to the most satisfying bliss in Paradise: it is an antidote for the fear of death; a sovereign remedy for every moral disease and evil which the apostacy of Adam has brought upon the world; so that the saved regain every thing which has been lost, and are confirmed in the unalienable possession of the joys of heaven^f.

How big with meaning is the word Salvation! Eternity will hardly be sufficient to appreciate the blessedness which it affords. It is, then, most ob-

^c Luke xix. 10.

^d John iii. 16.

^e Eph. i. 3.

^f 1 Pet. i. 2-6.

viously a good which every one should strive to obtain ; because it is so well adapted to our ruined condition, and to answer the highest expectations we can entertain of complete happiness. Make trial of the blessings of Christ's salvation ; and all the wretchedness and sorrow which sin has occasioned will, in your case, be converted into the liveliest and purest joy.

3. The effects which the grace accompanying salvation produces, prove its real importance. A principle of spiritual life is imparted to the soul, by which it is sanctified and governed. The heart, divorced from the love of the world, and from the gratifications of sense, becomes devoted to the pleasure of God. Every thing is made new by the moral revolution which is wrought on the mind^f. Objects which, in our unregenerate state, were deemed essential to our happiness, cease to attract us when we are made partakers of Christ's salvation ; and fresh sources of delight are opened, from which our souls derive the most exquisite satisfaction.

The change which Divine grace effects, even on those who have not been remarkable for a vicious life, is conspicuous. It destroys that good opinion which they before entertained of their own righteousness, which is now found to be defective ; and it produces a conviction of their own demerits, which compels them to build on the " foundation which is laid in Zion," for justification before God. And, further, a view of the riches of His grace towards them in Christ Jesus, leads them to extol the forbearance of God in sparing them so long, whilst they lived in disobedience to him ; and excites in them a holy resolution, founded on Divine assistance, to consecrate the remnant of their days to the honour of the Lord.

^f 2 Cor. v. 17. ^g Isa. xxviii. 16. 1 Cor. iii. 11.

The alteration which the saving grace of God effects in the whole deportment of persons who have been abandoned to a wicked and careless life is still more surprising. It is in the conversion of the vilest sinners that the triumphs of the cross shine forth so gloriously in our eyes. By the salvation of Jesus, the slaves of the basest lusts and passions are freed from their ignoble fetters, and are enabled to "run the way of God's commandments" with delight. The intemperate and the sensual and the lewd see the criminality of those guilty pleasures which have polluted their souls and bodies; and, forsaking them, are taught "to set their affections on things above," and to pursue those sublimer "joys which are at God's right-hand." The drunkard becomes sober, rejecting the intoxicating draught with abhorrence, as so much poison that would destroy him. The niggardly man is made liberal, communicating freely of his substance to the necessitous. And, finally, every class of ungodly persons, when made partakers of the grace of Christ, are prevailed on to abandon the sins to which they have been most addicted, and to walk in the celestial path which invites them to real happiness. So that, in the transformation of their souls, the pleasing scene is fully realized, as described by St. Paul:—"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new!" How marvellous and delightful the change! The rebel is turned into a loyal subject. The alien, the exile, and the outcast, become the sons of God, and, as dutiful children, enjoy the kind regards of their heavenly Father. They, who were once full of enmity to God, now love him fervently, and delight in his service. They, who before

were the bond-slaves of Satan, are converted into the willing servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. They, whose minds were full of darkness, corruption, and prejudice, are now filled with light, purity, truth, and with holy and generous affections. The things which they formerly loved they now hate; and their pursuits have taken a new direction. Well may it be affirmed of the subjects of such a change, "That they are born again, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God^h;" and that they are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that they should walk in themⁱ."

4. It is, however, from a view of the advantages which flow from the salvation of Christ, that we see its suitability to our wants, no less than its real excellency. Its privileges partly respect this life, but principally that which is to come. Its present benefits deserve to be noticed. Every one of those happy persons who are interested in the work of redemption, is blessed with the forgiveness of his sins. Christ has not only delivered his people from the guilt and dominion, but also from the ill consequences, of transgression. As their substitute, he paid the dreadful penalty of their offences by his voluntary submission to death, whereby he hath honoured the demands of Divine justice, and fully discharged their debts. Hence the Scripture affirms, that "through Jesus, is preached unto us the forgiveness of sins; and, by Him, all that believe are freely justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the Law of Moses^j." "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us^k." "There is, therefore, now no con-

^h John i. 12, 13. ⁱ Eph. ii. 10. ^j Acts xiii. 38, 39. ^k Gal. iii. 13.

demnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit¹."

Justification unto eternal life is a capital blessing of Christ's salvation, which includes not only a plenary remission of sin, and the acceptance of the penitent as a righteous character in Christ, but also a legal undisputed title to heaven; which is accompanied with the bestowment of that "peace which passeth all understanding," and those sweet manifestations of Divine favour which the Saved enjoy, in communion with the "God of their salvation".

Important and delightful as the privileges are which the believer enjoys on earth, yet they yield, in degree and perfection, to the future benefits of salvation, as much as the shadow does to the substance, or the sign to the thing signified by it.

5. In that heaven, for the enjoyments of which the salvation of Christ fits his people, there will be a perfection of holiness. The saints are imperfect in this life. They look for the completion of the gracious work begun in their souls, in that place where sin cannot enter. There, salvation, as to the great moral and religious change to be accomplished by it, will be thoroughly finished. Here there is a mixture of evil with good; of something that debases the best services of the most upright men. But there the saints will be absolutely free from all sinful emotions, and be confirmed in a state of righteousness, from which they will be in no danger of falling:—"And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads".

In heaven there will be, also, a perfection of hap-

¹ Rom. viii. 1. ² Ps. lxxxix. 15--18. ³ Rev. xxii. 3, 4.

pineness. In the courts of God below, the Christian sometimes catches a glimpse of heaven; but how soon does it recede from his eyes, and leave him to mourn for the glorious sight of which he has been so suddenly deprived! A large portion of sorrow is mingled with the joy of good men on earth, which renders the measure of their happiness scanty and imperfect.

But, when all the ransomed throng are brought home to their glorified abodes in heaven, how greatly will their bliss be increased and refined! They will then be continually receiving fresh accessions of a joy that is celestial, eternal, and satisfying. In that blest place, exempted for ever from sin and sorrow, they will receive the full accomplishment of those promises which, from the very nature of things, could but be partially fulfilled in this vale of tears. There, then, all that perfection of knowledge and holiness, and that fruition of heavenly pleasures, which Believers in the Church militant have so ardently sought, will be completely attained; and the soul, possessed of the most enlarged capacities, will not have to regret the absence of any thing that can possibly contribute to its felicity^{mm}.

Blest day! when all the saved shall join in acclamations of praise to their Deliverer, whose smile will render them perpetually happy; and say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing!—for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priestsⁿ."

6. This salvation, so glorious in its effects, so rich in its present privileges, and beneficial in its final

^{mm} 1 Cor. ii. 9.

ⁿ Rev. v. 9—12.

consequences, has been wrought out for us by the Son of God, who gives it to whomsoever he will, without any reference to their personal guilt or deserts. His voluntary sacrifice of himself has purchased for us all spiritual blessings. Hence, he is said to be "exalted with the right-hand of God, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins^o." Hence, he tenders salvation to every one who discovers his need of it, and wishes to obtain the blessing; saying, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth^p!" And, to encourage the application of penitent sinners, he declares, "He that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst^q." Yea, he remonstrates with men for rejecting the promised blessings of his Gospel, in order that they may gratify their insatiate desires after worldly vanities:—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price! Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David^r."

7. Now, though salvation is thus freely and gratuitously proposed, and though all must be eternally lost and undone unless they accept of it, yet many do not see that they have any need of it, and, consequently, will not apply to Jesus for its benefits.

^o Acts v. 31.

^q John vi. 35.

^p Isa. xlv. 22.

^r Isa. lv. 1—4.

But, except the blessings of salvation are received and applied by faith, how can they really profit the soul? Can thirst be allayed, and hunger satisfied, without meat and drink? Can the weary be refreshed without rest and sleep? Upon the same principle, how can the soul, which is dead in trespasses and sins, be ever made alive unto God, unless the Spirit of Truth quickens it for his service? How can "the conscience be purified from dead works to serve the living God," unless the blood of Christ is sprinkled thereon for the purpose of enabling it to perform its peculiar office? How can the enmity of our hearts to God be subdued and overcome, unless the love of Christ constrains us to live agreeably to his righteous will? How can our angry passions be controlled, unless the grace of Jesus reigns in our souls, to check their native violence? In fine, by what means is the mind of fallen man to be renewed and spiritualized, except "it is begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead?"

Now, if such a change can be expected from a mere admission of the Gospel, without an application of its truths to the heart and conscience producing a conformity thereto, then the profane and impenitent and unholy, whilst they continue such, may be saved, as well as the repentant and enlightened believer. But we are assured, from the word of God, "that except we repent, and be converted by the Spirit of Christ, without doubt we shall perish everlastingly".

8. Three things are indispensably necessary, to render our application to Christ, for salvation, successful :—

Penitence.—Our Lord must be sought with tears.

• Heb. ix. 14.

• Luke xiii. 1—5.

When we look on Him whom we have pierced by our sins, we should mourn^a. We should approach Jesus with the deepest sorrow for our transgressions, which reach unto heaven. Christ loves the sighing of the contrite heart, and will save such as be of a broken spirit^{uu}."

Go, then, penitent sinner! and weep at the cross; and there Jesus will speak peace to your troubled soul. He will say, "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee^z."

Faith, which exhibits in a proper light the evil and desert of sin, and the sufficiency of the Saviour's merits to justify the ungodly, and to rescue them from eternal death, is requisite to give weight to our application. Approach Jesus, then, O conscious sinner! in a believing spirit. Possess a thorough persuasion of his ability to save thee from the curse of the law—the domination of sin—the torments of hell.

Our Saviour requires those who solicit any spiritual favour, or healing, or cure for their souls, to repose unbounded confidence in His power to relieve and help them. They who exercise unshaken faith in him receive the benefit which they implore; but those who do not believe are sent empty away^{xx}.

Love.—We must not come to our Divine Redeemer with enmity in our hearts against him or his Gospel; for this would ensure our rejection. No, let us pray that our past aversion to Him may be turned into genuine affection, which is demonstrated by keeping his commandments. Draw nigh, then, to Christ, in admiration of the excellencies of his Divine nature, and of the great compassion which he manifested

^a Zech. xii. 10.

^z Luke vii. 47.

^{uu} Psalm xxxiv. 18.

^{xx} ib. i. 53.

towards us, "when he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost," for our salvation. It is not possible to shew too much regard to him : and those are most likely to attract his favourable notice of their sorrows who love him most. To every penitent, who, like Mary, evinces the strength of his attachment to Christ by the fervour of a grateful heart, he will say, "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven : thy faith hath saved thee : go in peace".

9. Once more, then, we entreat you, conscious sinners ! approach the Lord of Life and Glory. He stands ready to receive and bless you. Come, with a firm conviction that you have destroyed yourselves by your departure from God, and that you have no strength nor resources left by which you can redeem yourselves⁷⁷ ! Come ! and, in a spirit of renunciation, say, ' We will abandon every false confidence, and indulge no hope of salvation but in thy perfect righteousness, O Saviour ! To thee, therefore, we fly ; convinced that there is efficacy enough in Thy blood to atone for our accumulated sins ;—convinced that Thou canst rescue us from the deserved wrath of God which now impends over our devoted heads, and restore us to His favour ;—convinced that thou art able and willing to deliver us from hell, and exalt us to heaven. Convinced that Thou art ever disposed to hear the prayers of those who supplicate thy mercy, we cast ourselves at thy feet, and cry, " Lord, save us, or we perish !" " deliver us from eternal condemnation, and grant us peace !" " redeem us from all iniquity," and say unto our souls, " I am your salvation⁷⁸ !" So will we study to promote Thy glory, by

⁷⁷ Luke vii. 47—50.

⁷⁸ Mat. viii. 25.

⁷⁷ Hos. xiii. 9.

⁷⁸ Psalm xxxv. 3.

consecrating the rest of our days to thy service, O Lord, our Redeemer."

Whenever we thus renounce ourselves, and every plea of self-justification, Christ will vouchsafe to us a gracious reception. He will blot out our numberless transgressions, adorn our defiled souls with the "garments of salvation, and with the robe of righteousness*." He will endue us with every spiritual grace and virtue, and make us eminent for usefulness; and at last, when the period of our sojourning here is ended, he will admit us into everlasting mansions, to receive that consummation of joy which his merits have procured for us.

* Isa. lxi. 10.

LECTURE LXXXV.

ENCOURAGEMENTS HELD OUT TO THOSE WHO SINCERELY
APPLY TO CHRIST FOR SALVATION.

John vi. 37. *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

WHEN a man is brought, through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to discover his lost condition, and the suitableness of Christ's salvation to rescue him from Divine vengeance, he often feels considerable hesitation in accepting the blessings so freely tendered to him "without money and without price." On the one hand, an overwhelming view of his peculiar guilt, and the aggravations with which it has been marked, "takes such hold upon him, that he is not able to look up*," much less entertain a consoling hope of finding mercy from a God whom he has so causelessly and ungratefully provoked; and, on the

* Psalm xl. 12.

other, when he contemplates the stupendous love of God in our redemption by Christ, and surveys the dimensions of this ocean of grace, he is lost in wonder and amazement. But, whilst he silently adores its Author, he tremblingly inquires, ‘ Can such mercy be extended to me ? Can I, a hell-deserving rebel, expect pardon of my offences at the hand of God, from whom I have deeply revolted, or salvation from Christ, whom my sins have crucified ? Is not such mercy too big for one so vile and worthless ? I dare not receive these glad tidings, nor suppose they were intended for me !’ With suggestions like these, Satan endeavours to hold in captivity those penitent sinners who desire to abjure his authority, and to live henceforth in dutiful subjection to God.

The Ministers of the everlasting Gospel have received a Divine commission to silence such unbelieving objections—to obviate the scruples, and to answer the most anxious inquiries, of contrite souls who sigh for peace. They are instructed to declare “ that there is a rich, full, free, and everlasting forgiveness with God, that he may be feared ;” and they are directed to invite and beseech the weary and heavy laden to “ hope in the Lord ; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption^b.” By virtue of this undoubted authority, we proclaim, in the ears of the convinced sinner, “ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your

^b Psalm cxxx. 4—7.

ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts^c." Agreeably to the tenor of this proclamation, and the whole current of Scripture, we are authorised to assure the vilest and unworthiest of men, that, if they repent, neither the number nor the malignity of their sins shall deprive them of pardon. Did not Jesus save some of those Jerusalem sinners who bathed their hands in his blood? Did he not also make Paul of Tarsus, and others, monuments of his forgiving love; to encourage even the chief of transgressors, who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting, to confide in his mercy^d?

What, then, O penitent sinner! though your trespasses against Heaven be as numerous as the stars in the firmament, or as countless as the drops of water in the mighty ocean;—what, though the aggravated guilt of your offences should rise like pointed mountains to the skies, and cry for vengeance;—do you not hear the consoling voice of God, bidding you to cast away your desponding fears, as being no less dishonourable to the plenitude of His grace, than injurious to your own peace and comfort?—"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool^e." Yes, when your sins, however black their complexion, or deep their dye, are washed in the cleansing fountain of Christ's blood^f, they will instantly lose their defilement; and your soul, once covered with impurity, will be filled with righteousness and peace. Can you doubt this assurance? Then seek the removal of your unbelief, by deriving encouragement from the following considerations,

^c Isa. lv. 7—10.

^d 1 Tim. i. 11—17.

^e Isa. i. 18.

^f Zech. xiii. 1. John xix. 34.

which are adapted to dissipate your fears, and inspire you with the liveliest hope.

1. Meditate awhile on the character and offices of Christ. Think of his benevolence to men, in freely undertaking to redeem them from hell, when no one else in heaven or earth could have delivered them from its dreadful torments. Think of his love to a guilty world, in leaving the abodes of perfect felicity, where he was caressed by his Father and adored by the holy angels, to become incarnate, that by his doctrine and example he might instruct, and by his obedience and death he might save it. Recollect the insults and reproaches and injurious treatment he received both from Jews and Gentiles. Call to mind the privations and sufferings to which he cheerfully submitted for our salvation. Reflect on his self-denial, hunger, thirst, fastings, and watchings. Think of his unwearied labours in the cause of righteousness ; and, laying these facts together, do they not loudly proclaim the Saviour's love to men, and verify the words of Scripture, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye, through his poverty, might be rich?"

The offices which Jesus sustains for the salvation of his people may well cheer the drooping hearts of the contrite.

View him in his Priestly character. It was the province of the High Priests to offer the gifts and sacrifices of the people, to pray for and bless them in the name of the Lord. But Jesus, in his Sacerdotal capacity, has done infinitely more. To save those who put their trust in him, he shed his own most precious blood, which was accepted of God as

2 Cor. viii. 9.

the price of their eternal redemption from sin and suffering^b. And, in order to give full efficacy to his oblation, "he is gone into heaven, now to appear in the presence of God for usⁱ." "Behold, then, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world!" He is at the right-hand of the Father, pleading his merits in behalf of every repentant sinner, and procuring for him, by his powerful intercession, pardon and endless life.

Regard him in his Prophetic character. He is possessed of infinite wisdom, to instruct his people in all the deep things of God. He, being in the bosom of the Father, declares his counsels, and makes his will known to menⁱⁱ:—"Art thou sensible, O inquiring soul! of thy ignorance with respect to heavenly things? Then know, for thy comfort, that all the knowledge which is necessary for thy peace and establishment may be obtained from Christ, who teacheth to profit^k."

Consider his Kingly office. This he sustains for the good of his Church. Jesus, as King of Zion, rules in righteousness and mercy. It is true, "he will break the rebellious and unrelenting offender with a rod of iron, and dash him in pieces like a potter's vessel^l;" but he will shew the utmost compassion to the penitent; "he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax^m;" he will not scatter and destroy, but "feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with youngⁿ."

2. His behaviour towards those who sought his

^b Heb. ix. 12.

ⁱ ib. ix. 24.

ⁱⁱ John i. 18.

^k Isa. xlviii. 17.

^l Psalm ii. 9.

^m Isa. xlii. 3.

ⁿ Isa. xl. 10—12.

aid when on earth affords a full warrant to encourage the application of sinners who call upon his name. No sooner did the tale of sorrow reach his ear, than his benevolent soul was moved with compassion, and his hand was stretched out for the relief of the sufferer. Thus he gave sight to the blind, unstopped the ears of the deaf, loosed the tongues of the dumb, caused the stammerer to speak plainly, made the lame to walk, healed the sick, delivered those who were possessed of devils, and raised the dead to life again.

Nor was any application, when properly made, ever rejected ; nor any blessing denied to the humble and patient suppliant ;—as the relief granted and the cures performed by Christ amply testify^m.

Christ is the Sovereign Physician of the soul ; and He is still as much disposed to heal its disorders, as he was, in the days of his flesh, to cure men of their bodily maladies. Indeed, “ He hath ascended on high, and led captive the powers of darkness, and received gifts for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them^o. ” “ Him hath God exalted with his right-hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins^p. ” Now that Christ is triumphing in his kingdom of glory, he has largesses to bestow, and blessings to confer, not only on his friends, but even upon the stoutest of his enemies also, if they will but relent, and desist from their opposition to his righteous government. The blessings of his salvation shall be withheld from none but those who obstinately reject them, through

^m Mat. xv. 22—31. Mark v. 1—20. ib. 25—34. ib. 35—43. Mark x. 46—52. ib. iii. 1—6. ib. ii. 3—13. John xi. 1—47. John iv. 46—54. ib. vi. 1—15. ^o Ps. lxxviii. 18. ^p Acts v. 31.

an infatuated love of iniquity ; whom he will finally thus address :—“ Behold, ye despisers ! and wonder, and perish^q. ”

But upon every man, however enormous his past transgressions may have been, who is humbled before him, and solicits his favour, he will pour out, yea, lavish, the benedictions of his grace. There is no benefit, which he shed his blood to purchase, that he will refuse to those who sincerely seek him. He will grant pardon for all their offences ; he will vest them with his robe of righteousness, in which they shall appear complete before God ; he will assure them of their adoption into the family of heaven, and their special interest in his redemption. The grace of Jesus^q will be vouchsafed, to enable them to overcome temptation, and to make a pleasing progress in knowledge and goodness. From the suggestions of His Spirit they shall derive comfort in affliction, and by His all-powerful aid be emboldened and animated to press forward, amidst every difficulty and peril, till they arrive at heaven, to enjoy a state of indescribable happiness, secure and permanent as the eternal existence and power of God can render it.

From this view of our Lord's conduct towards those who seek his salvation, you, O contrite souls ! may derive abundant encouragement. If he declares that he will reject none who approach him in faith, what ground have you for supposing that he will not listen with an attentive ear to *your* sorrows, relieve your distress, and give you „the peace which passeth all understanding ?” Make but trial of his love ; and an experience of his readiness to save will force you to acknowledge, “Thou, Lord, hast never failed them that seek thee^r. ”

^q Acts xiii. 41.

^q 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^r Psalm ix. 10.

3. A fresh source of encouragement is opened from the promises made by Christ to the penitent. To remove any doubts which our unbelief may excite, Christ grants us the strongest assurances of his willingness to save. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden ! and I will give you rest: Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me : for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls*." To embolden the most desperate sinners to approach him with confidence, he avows ; "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out:" and, as if he felt anxious that they should comply with his invitation, he affirms, "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come ! And let him that heareth, say, Come. And let him that is athirst come: and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely".

4. Myriads in heaven are now realizing the truth of Christ's promises, to the fulfilment of which they ascribe their unchanging and perfect bliss. Once they were sinners, like ourselves ; but they repented, and believed the Gospel, and are now, in consequence thereof, reaping the blessed fruits of their Saviour's death. "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple : and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters : and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes^u."

* Mat. xi. 28—30.

* Rev. xxii. 17.

^t John vi. 37.

^u ib. vii. 14—17.

5. Multitudes in the Church militant can also bear testimony to the faithfulness of Christ in fulfilling his promises to the penitent. Millions can affirm that they never implored His grace in vain. The moment they first applied to him, he heard their cry, and granted them relief: and from that time to the present hour, he has prevented them with his goodness; yea, he has even anticipated their wishes, by comforting them in their tribulations, extricating them from difficulties and dangers, delivering them from the temptations of Satan, counselling them in perplexing circumstances, instructing them in the knowledge of his religion, and animating them with his promised assistance in every trial and emergency. Thus they have been enabled to continue steadfast to this day; and now they go forth continually in the strength of their Saviour, "conquering and to conquer:" and, after they have finished their course, they shall ascend to his glorious kingdom, where they will experience, through endless ages, fresh proofs of his unchangeable love.

6. Come, then, O disconsolate, oppressed soul! and roll thy burthen of guilt and fear and sorrow upon thy redeeming Lord; for he careth for thee². Are all the countless instances of his compassion to repentant sinners in heaven and earth to be of no avail, in scattering your doubts, and urging you to make trial of his goodness? Will you be held any longer in captivity by the Law, or in bondage by Satan, when Christ offers, yea, invites your acceptance of, the sweetest, the most delightful freedom³? Shall doubt and unbelief, then, deprive you for another hour of the benefits of Christ's salvation? Is it not desirable to be absolved from all your offences,

² Psalm lv. 22.

³ John viii. 36. Rom. viii. 21.

to be justified and accepted of God, to possess an undisputed title to heaven, and "the peace which passeth all understanding," as an undoubted assurance of the Divine favour?

These blessings you may have, the moment you make application to Christ for them.

You will not, therefore, by any further distrust, dishonour the faithfulness of Jesus, your only Saviour, who longs for your deliverance. Can you doubt this? Then, finally, see what he has done to convince you of his desire to save you. Did he not submit to shame, and reproach, and the most dishonourable and cruel death, to redeem you? Did he not sustain the whole weight of his Father's indignation, that you might escape it? And would he have endured all this so freely, if he did not mean to extend mercy to you and every humble suppliant?

Once more; we entreat you to dismiss your fears, and honour both the ability and the willingness of Christ to bless you. His benevolence, his voluntary mediation, his offices, his unceasing kindness to his Church, his invitations to sinners, all concur to reprove your hesitation, and to excite you to repose an unbounded confidence in His readiness to help you.

Come, then, and adventure into the presence of Christ, the King of Zion! and say, "If I perish, I perish;" but it shall be by trusting in his promise to save sinners:—and then he will hold out the sceptre of his grace, that you may touch it, and live for ever*: yea, he will assure you of his royal favour, and cause you to rejoice in his salvation evermore. "And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be

* Esther iv. 16.

* ib. v. 1—3.

gracious unto you ; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you : for the Lord is a God of judgment : blessed are all they that wait for him. He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry : when he shall hear it, he will answer thee^b."

^b Isaiah xxx. 18, 19.

LECTURE LXXXVI.

ON WALKING AND MAINTAINING COMMUNION WITH GOD.

Gen. v. 24. *And Enoch walked with God : and he was not, for God took him.*

WHERE a disposition exists to accept the salvation of Christ, and to conform to the Divine will, we cannot but entertain the most favourable opinion, as it respects the present state and the future prospects of him in whom it is found : his spirit and conversation prove that a Divine principle is at work within his soul, which, if cherished by suitable means, will lead to the most happy consequences. Scripture teaches us to indulge a confident hope, "that He who hath begun a good work in the heart of a believer will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ^a." Indeed, we may reasonably indulge this expectation, because "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance^b." For since "the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever, he will perfect that which concerneth his people, and not forsake the work of his own hands^c."

The work of grace, even in its most incipient state, is Divine. It is the germ or seed of a heavenly life begun in the soul, which, like an incorruptible

^a Phil. i. 6.

^b Rom. xi. 29.

^c Psalm cxxxviii. 8.

principle, liveth and abideth for ever^d. The influences of the Holy Ghost on the mind are likened to "a well of water springing up unto everlasting life^e."

Reader, are you able to trace the commencement of so happy a work on your own mind? If you feel any good emotions or holy desires arising within you, attribute them not to nature, but to Divine Grace, which alone maketh you to differ, both from your former self, and from the wicked world around you. "What hast thou, in this respect, that thou didst not receive^f?" Is your heart softened and humbled for your past unworthiness, and made willing to confide in the atonement of Christ for salvation? is your mind renewed? are your "affections set on things above?" and do you feel ardently desirous to glorify the Lord, who hath redeemed you? Then give God all the praise; for He has performed a Divine work on your heart, which none but an Omnipotent Agent could effect. And you have abundant reason to rejoice, for grace in the soul is glory begun; and, if improved by a religious life, it will most certainly conduct its possessors to everlasting bliss^g.

1. With respect to every difficulty and trial which the Christian life, on which you have entered, will present, you may take up the challenge of the Prophet, and say, "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it^h!"

Does Satan attack you with his fiery darts, and with his lying and wicked suggestions? Think it

^d 1 Pet. i. 23.

^e John iv. 14.

^f 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^g Rev. iii. 21.

^h Zech. iv. 7.

not strange if he should thus harass you with his temptations, as long as you live in this state of probation. Be not afraid, however, of his malignant hatred, nor of the cunning which he may employ in his assaults against you; for it is promised, that God shall "bruise him shortly under your feet¹."

Does the world oppose and deride you? "Marvel not at this²." It treated your Divine Master so before you¹; and He encourages you to perseverance in such conflicts, by the victory which he has obtained over it, and by the promise of Divine help, through which you also will be enabled to conquer it:—"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world^m." "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment, thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lordⁿ."

Do the remains of corrupt nature rebel against the right ways of the Lord? By the assistance of the Sacred Spirit, which will be vouchsafed unto you, your depraved appetites will be checked, and kept in due subjection^o; so that "sin shall not have dominion over you^p; but you shall "have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life^q."

The promises which are scattered throughout the Sacred Pages are all adapted to comfort and establish you.

Are you terrified at a view of your spiritual foes, lest they should destroy you? The Word of God ensures your protection:—"Fear not; I am thy

¹ Rom. xvi. 20.

^m John xvi. 33.

^p Rom. vi. 14.

² 1 John iii. 13.

ⁿ Isa. liv. 17.

^q ih. vi. 22.

¹ John xv. 18—22.

^o Rom. viii. 13—17.

shield, and thy exceeding great reward^r." Do your spirits sink beneath the weight of your afflictions? The word of the Lord has provided a cordial to sustain them:—"Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will hear thee; and thou shalt glorify me^s."

Do you require Almighty aid to rescue you from imminent danger? Scripture assures you that God is at hand to succour and deliver you:—"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right-hand of my righteousness^t." "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee^u."

Are you desirous to make progress in the road to heaven? You are encouraged to expect constant supplies of grace to carry you forward in the way that leadeth to life, so long as you are diligent in the use of appointed means:—"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their spiritual strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint^v." "Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled^w." Are you afraid of poverty and want? God engages that "bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure^x." Do you sometimes fear, lest you should not endure unto the end, "but make shipwreck of the faith, and of a good conscience^y?" So long as you

^r Gen. xv. 1.

^s Isa. xli. 10—15.

^t Mat. v. 6.

^u Psalm l. 15. & xci. 14—16.

^v ib. xliii. 2—4.

^w Isa. xxxiii. 16.

^x ib. xl. 28—31.

^y 1 Tim. i. 19.

cleave stedfastly to God, he^b has promised that “he will never leave nor forsake you^b,” but “deliver you from every evil work, and preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom^c.”

To give stability to the everlasting covenant of his mercy, which is “ordered in all things, and sure^d,” God has ratified it by the sanction of an oath:—“Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast^e.”

His veracity, without these solemn assurances, ought to be sufficient to remove every unbelieving fear; but, since he deigns to satisfy our scruples, let us honour his faithfulness by an unshaken affiance in his promises, which shall be accomplished in due season.

But let not “the heirs of promise^f” forget that the vows of God are upon them, and that the covenant which they have entered into with him lays them under a perpetual obligation to walk with him “in newness of life^g.” In order to discharge this duty aright, God requires them to be sincerely religious, and eminent for their attainments in holiness.

2. We must live by faith. True faith impresses the heart with an abiding sense of the Lord’s greatness, goodness, and continual presence. Thus it opens an intercourse between God and the soul, and produces

^b Heb. xiii. 5.

^c Heb. vi. 17—20.

^d 2 Tim. iv. 18

^e ib. 17.

^f 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

^g Rom. vi. 4.

a prevailing desire to please Him: Under the influence of this principle, Enoch was led to a holy conduct: "he walked with God," and, as a gracious recompence for his piety, he "was translated, that he should not see death^b."

Let us seek to "be rooted and established in the faith of Christ;" and let us not only assent to the general truths of religion, but, especially, "lay hold on the hope set before us" in our Lord Jesus Christ.

If we would maintain a becoming zeal for God, and be conspicuous for righteousness of life, we must pray for an "increase of faith," that, living and acting under its influence, we may be constantly excited to every holy and laudable act. Through its influence, the saints of old honoured the Lord, and "shone as lights in a dark ageⁱ." And, by the same means, we may "overcome the world^k," and secure the possession of heaven; for we "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time^l."

3. Walking with God implies that we should be studious to please him. Impressed with a sense of our obligations for "the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus^m," we should desire only to approve ourselves unto God, regarding his command, and not our own will and caprice, as the rule of our behaviour.

Whatever we learn from the Word of Truth to be offensive to God, we ought to renounce and shun: with the utmost care, though it may be admired by the multitude, and even amuse us with the hope of gaining some short-lived advantage; for what God prohibits, on pain of his displeasure, can never be

^b Heb. xi. 5.

ⁱ ib. xi. 1—40.

^k 1 John v. 4, 5.

^l 1 Pet. i. 5.

^m Eph. ii. 4—10.

profitable to us, notwithstanding it may exhibit a specious appearance of good.

Have we, then, previous to our conversion, been notorious for the immorality of our lives? Now, that we have dedicated ourselves to the Lord, it is especially incumbent on us to be circumspect in all things, because the eye of God, of angels, and of the world, is upon us. We must "not regard iniquity in our hearts," lest he should cast us off in his indignation; "but mortify our members, by putting away fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of our mouth; for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience".

And whatever we are assured from Scripture is the will of God concerning us, that we should studiously pursue; because, whilst it is pleasing to him, it will also conduce to our spiritual benefit. The more we grow in grace, and heavenly dispositions, the nearer we approach unto God, and resemble him in his moral excellencies. Wherefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, "be ye renewed in the spirit of your mind; and, putting on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness"; "give all diligence to add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord

° Col. iii. 5—13.

° Eph. iv. 23, 24.

Jesus Christ^p." Thus, at the same time that you please God, you will "make your calling and election sure; and so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ^p."

4. We ought to live as always in His presence, if we would walk with the Lord unto all well-pleasing. Faith enables the soul "to endure, as seeing God, who is invisible^q;" and prompts us to act under the impression that his eye is upon us, and that he beholds every thing we do^r. Such an habitual regard to God would have the happiest effect on our whole deportment. "It was the advice of a Heathen, as the strongest inducement to a steady perseverance in virtue, always to imagine some good man present; but, to be constantly mindful that God's eye is upon us, must surely make a deeper impression on our hearts, produce in our most secret retirements a salutary fear of offending him, and in the most effectual manner disperse all vile thoughts and imaginations. This consideration, also, would animate us to an unremitting zeal and activity in our public conduct, preserve us from making any base compliances with sinners, and render us useful in every relation of life."

5. We must maintain communion with God. Our aim should be to live in a state of friendship with God, conciliating his affections towards us by an undeviating attention to all things whatsoever he enjoins us.

We should make Jehovah the supreme object of our delight, and seek our happiness from Him alone,

^p 2 Pet. i. 5—12.

^q Heb. xi. 27.

^r Psalm. cxxxix. 1—15. & Heb. iv. 13.

as the source from whence all those blessings flow which we need for time and eternity.

The manifestations of God's favour can only be expected in the conscientious discharge of our duty. In this way we shall enjoy intercourse with God, until the Spiritual life which he has commenced in us shall be perfected in future glory*.

The Lord our God will manifest his approbation of such conduct, and grant his faithful servants special tokens of his Royal regard.

6. He will be a God and Father unto them. He now condescends to call those who honour him by the endearing name of Children; and, as a proof of their relation to him, he sends into their hearts "the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father." Hence, "the Spirit itself beareth witness with their spirit, that they are the Children of God†."

In consequence of this near connexion, the Lord shews every mark of paternal kindness to his spiritual sons. He allows them to ask for those things which will conduce to his glory, and promote their welfare, with a confident expectation that they shall obtain them‡.

Nor is there any "good thing that the Lord withhold from them that walk uprightly*." He supplies their various bodily wants in that measure which he deems most advantageous for them, assists them in all their difficulties, extricates them from danger, comforts them in the day of trouble, and preserves them from being overcome by temptation; in a word, he guides them, as long as they sojourn on earth, by

* 2 Cor. iii. 18.

† Rom. viii. 14—18. & Gal. iv. 5—8.

‡ 1 John v. 14—16.

* Psalm lxxxiv. 11.

his counsel; and afterwards receives them to glory'. Well might the sons of God exclaim with David, on a view of what he is, and promises to be, unto them, "Whom have we in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that we desire in comparison of thee. Our flesh and heart faileth; but God is the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever".

7. He will allow them the privilege of approach to and communion with, himself. Enoch and Abraham and Moses were permitted to hold converse with God. To him they had access with holy confidence. They enjoyed, without doubt, whilst on earth, the sweetest tokens of his favour.

These distinguishing privileges were not confined to ancient times, but are promised to all believers in every age. "For thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit". "If, then, we walk in the light," we shall be allowed "to have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ"; God will indulge us with a free and unrestrained access to himself; he will permit us to come into his presence, with a certainty of obtaining a gracious reception for our persons; yea, he will listen to our complaints, assuage our sorrows when they are made known to him, and gratify every reasonable wish we express.

We may ask for his guidance in our difficulties, with a hope that, through his Word and Spirit, he will vouchsafe "the wisdom which is profitable to direct us." Indeed, there is no spiritual blessing, that is necessary for their comfort and establishment

¹ Ps. lxxiii. 24.

² ib. 25—27.

³ Isa. lvii. 15.

⁴ 1 John i. 3.

⁵ John xvi. 23—28.

in the Divine life, which he will not communicate to his sons. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted^d."

8. Finally, God assures his obedient people, that his affection for them is unalterable, and that they shall inherit his kingdom for ever.

The Lord, having given his beloved Son to redeem them for a purchased possession to himself, has resolved that "all things, even the most adverse, shall work together for their good;" that nothing shall prevent the accomplishment of his purposes concerning them; and that "neither tribulation nor distress, nor persecution nor famine, nor nakedness nor peril, nor sword nor death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord^e." "Happy is the people that is in such a case: yea, happy is the people whose God is the Lord^f."

^d Ps. lxxxix. 15, 16.

^e Rom. viii. 28—39.

^f Ps. cxliv. 15.

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- P. 22. l. 13. read *in* for *into*.
23. l. 29. dele *to possess this happiness*.
26. l. 14. read *its* for *it*.
39. l. 2. read *sincerest*.
■ 50. l. 18. read *does visit* for *visit*.
54. l. 24. read *all things* for *things*.
72. l. 32. read *humane* for *humanity*.
88. l. 12. read *most*.
ib. l. 14. read *the practice* for *a practice*.
188. l. 17. read *cool* for *stop*.
228. l. 3. read *to* for *with*.



